the weekly Standard

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SEVEN HOURS IN KABUL
STEPHEN F. HAYES

# A Lobbyist's Progress

by Andrew Ferguson

Jack Abramoff is sworn in for questioning by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, September 29, 2004

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*by the parent company of Kraft Foods, Philip Morris International and Philip Morris USA*

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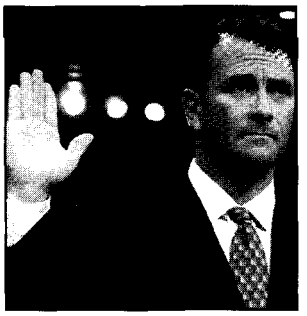

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# Congratulations, America

She's finally gone. One of the sorrier chapters in the history of federal employment ended with an unexpected whimper December 7, when Mary Frances Berry "resigned" from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights after 24 wholly counterproductive years. She was two days late with the move, and it was technically unnecessary, since her most recent six-year appointment by President Clinton had actually expired December 5. But there's always been something about Mary, so she'd been threatening, without explanation, to continue occupying her office another couple of weeks—and to sue anyone who tried to stop her. Instead, for what's probably the first time in her high-pitched life, Berry decided to go quietly.

Ms. Berry is survived at the Commission, which she had ruled like a cult leader since becoming chairman in 1993, by a depressingly large number of career-staff acolytes. But the White House is already at work on the problem thus posed. Berry "will be asked for her keys to the building," one Commission insider tells the *Washington Times*, "although we will still have to change the locks, because there are many people here who are loyal to her who would allow her in." (One such, longtime Berry henchman and Commission staff director, Les Jin, has since been "released" from the agency, according to the *Washington Post*.)

Also among the mourners are . . . well, let's see . . . the Chinese Communist party, maybe? They're probably still grateful for that speech Berry gave back in 1980 praising Beijing's educational system for its successful inculcation of "what they call socialist consciousness and culture."

Most definitely not among the mourners, we'd bet, are Ms. Berry's moderate and conservative ex-fellow commissioners, whom she famously treated like dirt. Notable among the long-suffering stalwarts: social scientist Abigail Thernstrom, who's now become the Commission's vice chairman (replacing Berry ally Cruz Reynoso, who also "resigned" December 7), and law professor and WEEKLY STANDARD contributor Jennifer Braceras. The new chairman of the Commission, incidentally, named to replace Ms. Berry herself by President Bush, is former Education Department official and energy-industry attorney Gerald A. Reynolds. Hoorah!

Oh, yeah, one other thing, this too from the *Washington Post*: "Berry did not return several telephone calls placed to her through the public relations firm McKinney & Associates Inc., which contacted her on behalf of reporters while she was at the Commission." It seems Ms. Berry had for several years retained a private, outside media gatekeeper—at federal expense, something like $150,000 per annum—and refused to discuss her public business through any other channel.

Not to worry. "One of the first things we're going to do," says new chairman Reynolds, "is have an audit." ♦

## Be Prepared

THE SCRAPBOOK continues to scratch its head over the November 29 Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in *Forum for Academic and Institutional Rights* v. *Rumsfeld*. That's the one barring enforcement of the federal government's so-called Solomon Amendment, which requires colleges and universities to cooperate with Defense Department employment recruiters or forfeit their federal funding. The Third Circuit thinks it's found a serious First Amendment infirmity in the Solomon Amendment, at least as applied to schools that claim to be conscience-bound not to let their students talk to military job interviewers. And that's what the plaintiffs claim to be. They're an ad hoc coalition of law schools and professors who disapprove of the Defense Department's "don't ask, don't tell" policy with respect to openly homosexual employees.

The specific First Amendment "right" these plaintiffs are advancing is basically—as we pointed out last week—a right not to be exposed as hypocrites. The law schools are demanding that the federal government stop tempting them to tacitly abandon their anti-discrimination principles. Which is, they say, exactly what's been happening in recent years: The schools inevitably wimp out, pocket their federal money, and let Pentagon attorneys attend their campus job fairs. We are thus aiding and abetting Pentagon homophobia, the plaintiffs complain. Help us stop!

It's what seems to us a self-evidently preposterous argument. We nevertheless find ourselves moved to congratulate the people who are now advancing it for their exquisite sense of irony.

The law schools in question are asserting a collective privilege to censor armed-forces recruitment messages under a First Amendment doctrine known as "expressive association." And as the Third Circuit majority opinion points out, under certain circumstances, "expressive associations" like these law schools might indeed enjoy a constitutional entitlement to exclude unwelcome thoughts and individuals from their midst. If, that is, the Supreme Court's most recent explication of expressive association theory is correct. The Third Circuit ruling states



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it plainly: "In *Dale*, the Supreme Court recognized that '[t]he forced inclusion of an unwanted person in a group' could significantly affect the group's ability to advocate its public or private viewpoint." And the First Amendment cannot tolerate such interference in free advocacy.

Did you get the joke? The *Dale* case referred to is *Boy Scouts of America* v. *Dale*, a 2000 decision wherein the high court announced that a state public accommodations law couldn't constitutionally be used to impel the Boy Scouts to accept an openly gay assistant scoutmaster. *Dale* was widely decried as a right-wing atrocity at the time.

Not any more, apparently. All of a sudden America's leading law schools and faculty bigshots seem to think *Boy Scouts of America* v. *Dale* was correctly decided.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. ♦

## Happy Anniversary

The Collegiate Network celebrated its 25th birthday at a Capitol Hilton reception here in Washington a couple weeks back. Most recently as an arm of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, the group has been sponsoring conservative student newspapers around the United States—and funding internships at national publications like this one—since 1979. And it has much to be proud of, as Collegiate Network cofounder Irving Kristol explained in a letter read to the crowd at evening's close. We excerpt that letter below:

> Although academia is still predominantly liberal, it is no longer exclusively and oppressively so—in good part, thanks to you. The faculty as a whole, to be sure, is even more liberal today than it was—and, what is worse, more politicized and more intolerant of dissenting opinion. The student body, on the other hand, to the dismay of the faculty, has become distinctly more conservative than it once was. Conservatives are still a minority among students, but no longer a beleaguered minority. They constitute, in effect, a counterculture on the campus, a counterculture that finds its support and its legitimization in the country as a whole—as witness the recent election.
>
> In the university, as in the polity as a whole, this counterculture welcomes different versions of conservatism—different ideas, strategies, policies. Liberals like to portray this diversity as somehow a weakness in conservatism. In fact, it is an asset, especially in the university, for it stimulates intellectual and moral energies that might otherwise become inert and dull. If this stimulation and education takes place among the students, quite apart from the faculty, that too may be to the good; self-education is sometimes more pleasurable and gratifying than formal education.
>
> Congratulations for all you have accomplished in this past quarter of a century, and for all you are bequeathing to future generations of students and alumni. ♦



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# Casual

## Step to It

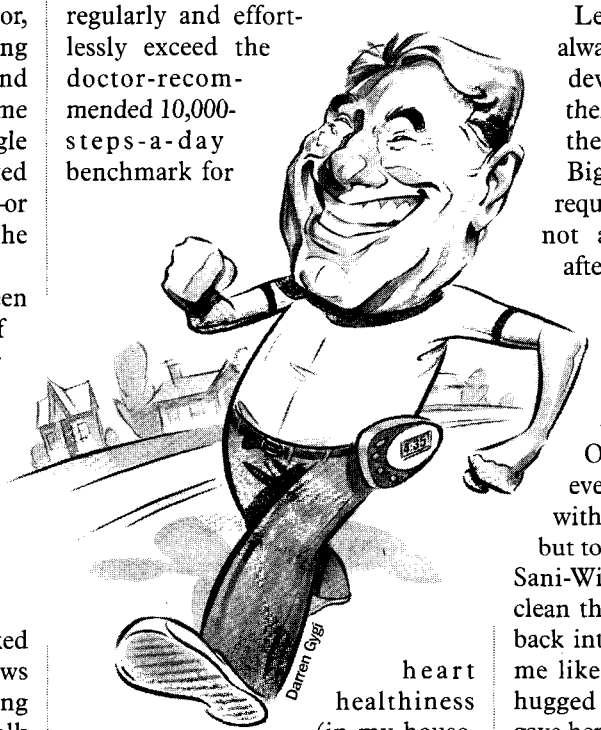
The most desultory happenstance can irrevocably alter our lives. So it went last Christmas, the day I became an intolerable bore. My sister-in-law, who'd finally exhausted the effeminate sweater collection from Banana Republic, decided instead to buy me something I'd actually requested. I'd wanted a heart monitor, to make sure I was properly taxing myself in the gym. She obliged, and unbeknownst to both of us, it came with a little freebie plastic rectangle that clipped to my belt and counted my every step. It was a pedometer—or as I've since come to know it, "the future."

Most recipients would've been more interested in the pattern of the discarded wrapping paper or the discreet note asking for a mistletoe make-out session (it's a very close family). But I immediately recognized the pedometer for what it was: a miracle of modern science on a par with the polio vaccine or maybe even the juice box.

I'd spent most Christmases tucked into the wassail or weeding cashews out of the mixed-nut bowl, lazing away the morn while the womenfolk did the heavy lifting. But no more. Now I was shot from a cannon, racking up valuable steps on makework errands. Kids need their presents taken to the car? Great—42 steps round-trip. Uncle Drippy Drawers's colostomy bag leaking? I'll fetch the spare—37 steps.

At home, I found new ways to lend meaning to the meaningless, to make order out of what I'd formerly regarded as chaos. Toddler plunging the toilet with his foot again? I'll stop him (24 steps). Older son has screaming younger son in figure-four leglock? I'm on it (19 steps and a scissor kick). Meddlesome neighbor ringing bell to extend unwanted dinner invite? Got it covered (32 steps and a drop-and-roll behind the armoire).

Mind you, I'm not one of those obsessive-compulsive wack-jobs who pulls patches of hair from his head or rewashes his hands if he's touched the soap dispenser. Though I regularly and effortlessly exceed the doctor-recommended 10,000-steps-a-day benchmark for heart healthiness (in my house, we just call it being "in the bonus"), for me, it isn't about that. Rather, it's about watching the seeming emptiness of everyday actions add up to something quantifiable. And it does, too. I've got the spreadsheets to prove it.




Admittedly, I've become an addict, and pedometers are my crack. I would never think of sleeping in the raw, because upon waking, I reach for my pedometer before I reach for the alarm, so that I can clip it to my underwear waistband. Wouldn't want to lose paces on the way to the morning squirt (12 steps). Since that fateful Christmas Day, I've ripped through seven pedometers. Some I've lost to swimming pools or crushing mishaps. Most of the time, I keep a backup handy, which allows me to run controlled experiments between models to measure accuracy (say, the bottom-of-the-line pedometer included in a McDonald's Happy Meal vs. the top-of-the-line Omron HJ-112). Walking around with two pedometers hanging from either side of your belt, you do draw a fair amount of ridicule from friends and detractors. But as a romantic, I like to think I look like Wyatt Earp instead of a clerk at Circuit City.

Less visionary types don't always understand such depths of devotion. Usually, I dismiss them, telling them to wallow in their inertia and have another Big Mac (walking one off requires 11,000 steps). But this is not always advisable. Recently, after returning from a trip, I told my wife how, on the train, I was in the lavatory, and my pedometer fell into the waterless steel commode. A cheap model—maybe a Q-One or a Q-One Plus—it didn't even have a calorie counter. Still, without a backup, I had no choice but to fish it out with a pen, cadge a Sani-Wipe from a fellow passenger, clean the little bugger up, and put it back into commission. She looked at me like I'd grown a third ear, then hugged me in mock consolation. I gave her a good shove.

"Why'd you push me away?" she asked.

"Because you might accidentally reset me," I said, favoring my pedometer side.

She's a sensitive one, my wife. So she ended this revelry and took off up the stairs to our bedroom (29 steps). This got me to thinking that there is a fine line between fixation and the descent into madness. I'll probably be the last to know where that line is. But at least I'll know how many steps it takes to get there.

**Matt Labash**



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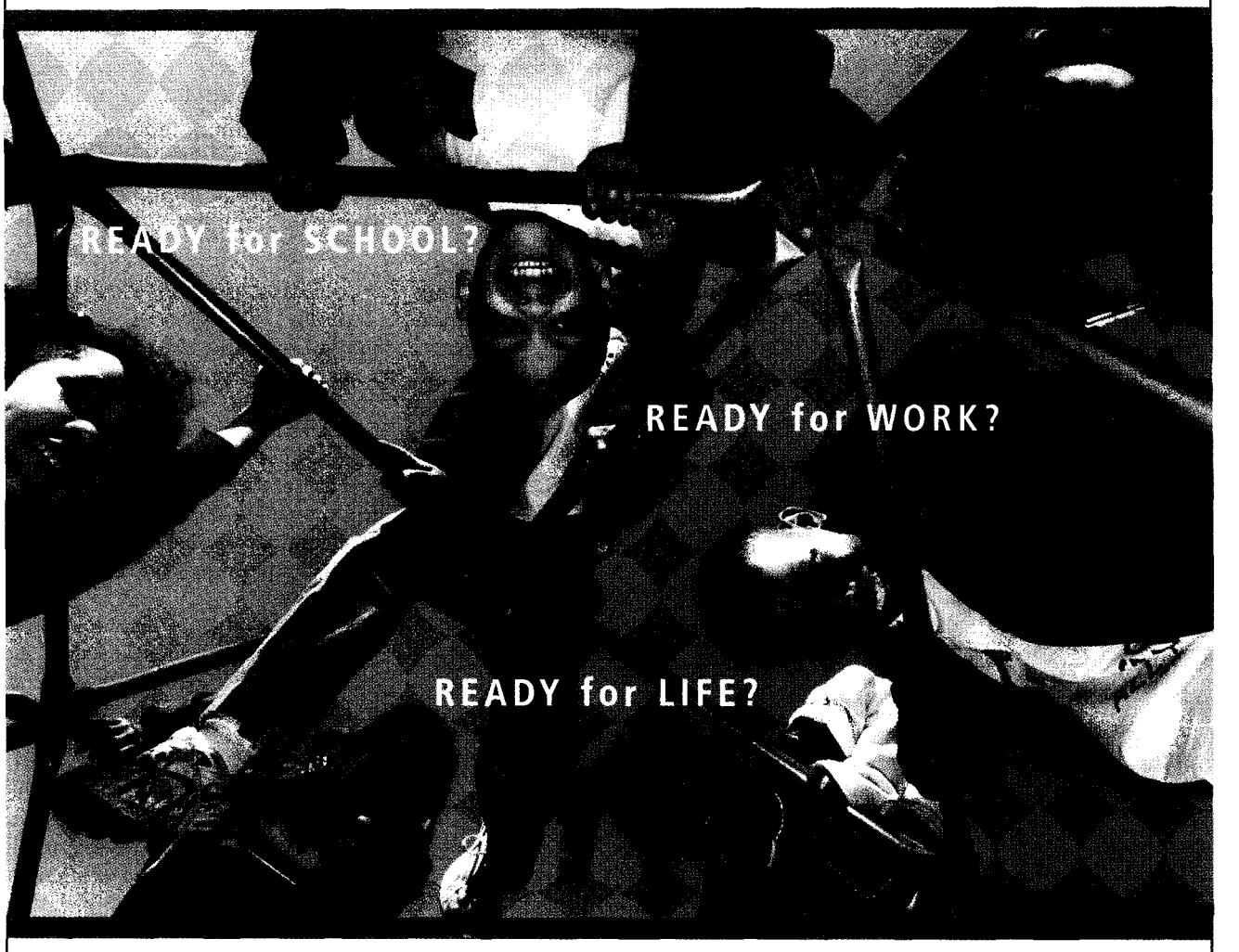
# national priority.

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opportunities to give back through community service

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## Back to Arkansas . . .

In one "Clintonmania" week in Arkansas, Matt Labash gathered enough material for a book and then condensed his perspective into a well-written, interesting article to share with the droves of people who were not there ("Clintonmania," Dec. 6). I reminded him that twice as many fans attend Arkansas Razorback football games every weekend.

Matt's persistent persuasiveness propelled me to a reunion I would otherwise have missed. In retrospect, I'm glad I went to the reunion, and glad that I took Matt with me, for three reasons. One, I would not have taken the time to drive all over town by myself, and it was an illustrative, if disappointing, eye-opener to see the changes in Hot Springs. Two, I reconnected with a woman I've long admired (not a Clinton fan either), and look forward to our next visit. Three, dealing with the small-minded people from my old high school class provided the personal satisfaction of popping a zit.

Dolly Kyle Browning
*Dallas, TX*

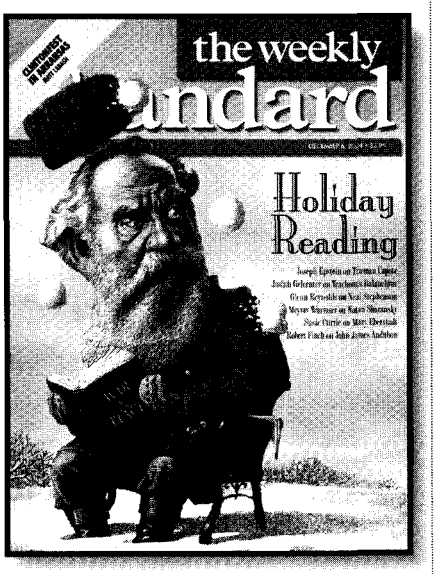
## Defusing North Korea

Suggestions on how to negotiate with North Korea are most persuasive when they incorporate practical experience and objective analysis of all relevant factors. Nicholas Eberstadt's "Tear Down This Tyranny" (Nov. 29) reflects too much reliance on unproven theory and not enough consideration of practical experience. In a word, it is impractical.

To resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, Eberstadt implicitly recommends a more confrontational U.S. policy approach that is not likely to bear fruit. North Korea has never succumbed to external pressure over the past 50 years, despite the wishes of foreign ideologues. Conversely, pressure tactics have strengthened the regime.

With respect to the six recommendations that Eberstadt makes, I will limit my comments to points four and five. The fourth recommendation that Washington "[work] around the pro-appeasement crowd in the South Korean government" offends on multiple levels. Calling on the U.S. government to intervene in South Korean domestic politics is inappropriate, to say the least, while the article's contempt for South Korean democracy is breathtaking. Confusing "appeasement" with thoughtful diplomacy is irresponsible. Ignoring the South Korean experience in negotiating with North Korea is not wise. We South Koreans fully recognize the difficulties of negotiating with Pyongyang, having conducted more such negotiations than any other nation. Aware of what approaches are likely to generate agreeable or counterproductive responses from North Koreans, we have a different view on how to deal with North Korea.

Eberstadt's fifth recommendation—"Readying the nondiplomatic instru-




ments for North Korea threat reduction"—seems to imply that the United States should unilaterally implement military measures to end North Korea's nuclear program. Such a recommendation ignores the consequences on U.S. allies in the region and other states as well as the subsequent implications for U.S. influence in the region. If the author is advocating war, can he wonder why North Korea would seek to improve its defense capabilities?

Peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue in a way that strengthens the ROK-U.S. alliance and preserves U.S. influence in the region will solidify President Bush's legacy far more effectively than will the suggestions outlined in the article. South Koreans and the government of President Roh Moo-hyun stand firmly with the United States in crafting policies to achieve these important objectives.

Soo-Dong O
*Minister for Public Affairs*
*Embassy of the Republic of Korea*
*Washington, DC*

## The Right Reform

I initially thought that John D. Mueller's "Taxes, Social Security, and the Politics of Reform" (Nov. 29) was going to be a well-reasoned and sorely needed insertion of sober realism into conservative discussions of issues that are often prone to superficiality and triumphalism. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a missed opportunity, a woefully misinformed piece that employs the right rhetoric but draws entirely erroneous conclusions.

I'll leave it to others to correct Mueller's misstatement of the sources and implications of Social Security's unfunded liability. What was particularly galling was his misuse of human capital theory. Mueller was right to criticize many free-market analysts and pundits for ignoring the role that human capital formation plays in wealth creation. They mistakenly view income tax deductions, exemptions, and credits taken by families with children as some kind of special-interest gift or unwarranted intrusion into markets. In truth, these devices are attempts, however clumsy, to recognize the fact that at least part of the expense of child-rearing is properly thought of as an investment in future taxable earnings akin to investments in other kinds of income-generating assets. As such, they should be treated like IRA deposits: Either the principal or the return (in this case future earnings), but not both, should be subject to tax.

The problem is that Mueller failed to draw the right lesson from this insight. He concluded that moving to a consumption-based tax system would discriminate against human capital in favor of physical or financial capital. Not at all. A true consumption-based tax system would treat investment *in all its forms* as future consumption, and thus exclude it from today's tax base to avoid double taxation.



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Over the past 15 years, many free-market writers and institutions have come up with a number of policies, such as IRA-like savings accounts for health care and education expenses, that can properly be used as part of a consumed-income tax model to accomplish this kind of tax reform. It is true that some on the right don't understand their function and mistakenly consider them deviations from market neutrality. Advocates of a national sales tax, in particular, have failed to think through what would have to be exempt from their new tax (part of college tuition and medical bills, for example) in order to maintain neutrality regarding present and future consumption. They need to be confronted about this problem, but Mueller didn't even try.

Instead, he articulated ideas for income taxation and Social Security that would retain many of the tax biases and redistributionist elements of the current system. They also seemed remarkably antiquated, as was Mueller's odd contention that stock ownership is a claim on physical property while Social Security is essentially "a share in a diversified human capital mutual fund." In today's financial markets, much of the value of a security is derived from the corporation's ability to attract, train, and retain highly productive employees. Investing in stocks is most certainly a way to invest in human capital, which is largely formed in expectation of higher earnings from employers, and sometimes with direct funding from current or prospective employers. Indeed, on-the-job training remains a more productive investment of dollars than formal education is in many instances. Mueller asserted that a college degree "roughly [doubles] average annual earnings," which is an excellent example of the fallacy of the average: While college is a great financial investment for some, especially those going into highly paid professions requiring advanced degrees, it is not a particularly productive investment for many others who attend largely because government has made it appear artificially inexpensive.

Mueller later advocated a spectacularly bad idea: "reforming" the income-tax code by imposing more tax at the business level so that "tens of millions of people . . . would no longer have a personal relationship with the IRS every April" except for those getting a "human maintenance" rebate check. This would take us 180 degrees in the wrong direction by further camouflaging the costs of big government. Americans need more of a "personal relationship" with the IRS, not less, so they will come to appreciate how much of their income it is taking each year, and in what screwy manner. We need to change and ultimately eliminate withholding, so that voters write personal checks directly to Washington instead of getting welcome "rebate" checks from Washington. Mueller's tax reform would be economically and politically disastrous.

One can only hope that Republican leaders in Washington will not fall for Mueller's policy prescriptions, which constitute a fundamental betrayal of the principles they have articulated in their campaigns and would do little to advance the causes of economic growth, smaller government, and greater personal freedom.

JOHN HOOD
*John Locke Foundation*
*Raleigh, NC*

**JOHN D. MUELLER RESPONDS:** John Hood was a valiant but impetuous Confederate general who lost his army by attacking adversaries before learning their positions as well as they knew his. General Hood's namesake has put himself in a similar predicament.

Let's start with Social Security, to which Mr. Hood gives short shrift. I wrote, "While a financial account is essentially a claim on property, a pay-as-you-go Social Security retirement pension amounts to a share in a diversified human capital mutual fund." Mr. Hood summarizes this as "Mueller's odd contention that stock ownership is a claim on physical property while Social Security is essentially 'a share in a diversified human capital mutual fund.'"

The argument that Mr. Hood premised on misplacing "essentially" and inserting "physical" is unimportant but not unanticipated. Some employee skills are specific to a firm (like knowing at which golf course to find the vice president on Wednesday afternoons), and the training cost is borne by shareholders, since employees cannot earn money with the knowledge in a job at another firm. But most skills are transferable (including all skills acquired by formal education and general training), and in a competitive market the return is received by workers, not by shareholders "investing in stocks." Hence "essentially." Mr. Hood's dyspepsia at the "misuse of

## CORRECTION

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*Yes, as several readers pointed out, that's Charles Lindbergh on the right, next to Sen. Burton K. Wheeler at a May 23, 1941, America First rally in New York—and not the other way around, as we mistakenly had it in a caption in the Nov. 29 issue.*



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human capital theory" can be relieved by closer attention to its use.

More interesting is the part Mr. Hood reported correctly. Instead of disputing my description, he abandoned the field, saying, "I'll leave it to others to correct Mueller's misstatement of the sources and implications of Social Security's unfunded liability." Well, why? Mr. Hood has written a book discussing Social Security at length. He retreated, dear reader, because my 16-word description unwittingly exploded Mr. Hood's elaborate ideology about Social Security and exposed its glaring inconsistency with his ideology of taxation.

After agreeing with my critique of "consumption"-taxers' definitions of *investment*, Mr. Hood wrongly suggests that I do or should think that all income-generating investment in people or property "should be treated like IRA deposits: Either the principal or the return . . . but not both, should be subject to tax." But I did not propose that labor compensation resulting from earlier investment in child rearing and education that was not tax-deductible should be tax-free for the rest of those workers' lives. I proposed instead that there be "no double taxation of any income" (as of some dividends). It's not "double taxation" to pay last year's tax on last year's income and this year's tax on this year's income.

The easiest way to dispose of Mr. Hood's tax plan is to take it seriously. As it happens, I did so a couple of years ago for the author of one of the many "consumption" taxes. Assuming that all federal income, payroll, estate, and gift taxes would be replaced—and poverty-level "human maintenance" exempted (as that fellow proposed)—it turned out that the tax rate on what Mr. Hood calls "true consumption" was a flat 61 percent (or 43 percent inclusive of the tax, as income tax rates are usually calculated).

To a narrow base and high tax rates, Mr. Hood adds endless complexity and government intrusion, by switching from consumption as *using-up* (of property) to *enjoyment in using* (by people). This is why he would exempt *all* investment in income-earning property, but "*part* of the expense of child-rearing" and "*part* of college tuition and medical bills" (emphasis added). Just as we may use a computer either to run a business or play games, and drive a car for business or pleasure, we may use our faculties for earning income or enjoying ourselves—or (a possibility Mr. Hood did not conceive) both at once. As he noted in a column last year, "many students may choose to specialize in low-paying but rewarding subjects." By this principle, if Mr. Hood judges that a student *enjoys* learning, there's no tuition deduction. But then why not apply the same rule to, say, the deduction for a company car?

Finally, Mr. Hood insists that most Americans are wrong to *want* the simplicity of not having to file income tax returns, or having their taxes withheld by their employers. "Americans need more of a 'personal relationship' with the IRS, not less," he declares; and "we need to change and ultimately eliminate withholding, so that voters write personal checks directly to Washington instead of getting welcome 'rebate' checks from Washington." And he thinks *my* tax reform would be "politically disastrous"?

Why should Congress enact a 16 percent or 18 percent flat tax rate on all income, with taxes rebated on poverty-level "human maintenance" and most taxpayers not having to file a tax return, merely because people *want* such a plan? Mr. Hood says they *need* a 43 percent (or 61 percent) tax, with deductions allowed only after convincing the IRS that your studies weren't "rewarding" and that you worked on spreadsheets rather than playing computer games. Political catnip!

As Ronald Reagan (who reformed the income tax and pay-as-you-go Social Security) put it in the 1977 speech with which I began my article: "If there is any ideological fanaticism in American political life, it is to be found among the enemies of freedom on the left or right—those who would sacrifice principle to theory, those who worship only the god of political, social, and economic abstractions, ignoring the realities of everyday life. They are not conservatives."

## That's Rall, Folks!

Regarding The Scrapbook's recent item on Ted Rall (Dec. 6): A fellow Air Force historian introduced me to the guilty pleasure of reading Rall's columns and viewing his hideous cartoons a couple of years ago. Before that, I had naively assumed that no one could manage Rall's combination of viciousness, elitism, and sheer ugliness.

We've since had our favorites; the slimy attack on Pat Tillman after his death in Afghanistan sticks out particularly in my mind. Sometimes it is necessary to be reminded what sort of person makes up the opposition. Recently Rall wrote a column that demeaned even those Americans who gave their lives in World War II.

It's good to see Ted Rall and his "work" getting more attention. The more people know, the better. Thanks for bringing his views to The Weekly Standard's wider audience.

Bill Brockman
*Atlanta, GA*

## Canadian Bacon

As a Canadian subscriber, I was quite pleased to see The Scrapbook (Dec. 6) note the expulsion of Carolyn Parrish from the Canadian Liberal party caucus. Unfortunately, the reason for her expulsion was not her anti-American diatribes. Even when commenting on her most recent destruction of President Bush in effigy, the prime minister would only express disappointment. It was not until after that incident, when Ms. Parrish gave a radio interview in which she expressed utter disdain for the prime minister and explained that she wouldn't give a damn if he and the party lost the next election, that she was booted from the government.

Anti-Americanism keeps the Liberal party in power, and hence is tolerated or promoted. Disloyalty is not.

David K. Mulvale
*Toronto, Ontario*

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the weekly Standard

# Getting Serious About Syria

"We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."

*George W. Bush, Address to Congress, September 20, 2001*

The story was in the December 2, 2004, London *Daily Telegraph*, on page 14, by Jack Fairweather, datelined Damascus. Its headline: "All aboard the terrorists' bus to Iraq. Mujahideen mosques are springing up all over Syria to arm militants and send them across the border to do battle with the hated Americans."

Here are the highlights:

WHEN not in Iraq, Abdullah cuts meat for a living. He is a Syrian cook at the Kingdom of God restaurant in Damascus, in a bustling suburb dominated by Iraqi exiles.

For the past year, Abdullah has also been on the payroll of Iraqi resistance forces fighting American troops. . . .

In April, the 23-year-old boarded a convoy of American GMCs in Aleppo, northern Syria, with 10 other fighters from the area.

He had been recruited at a mosque 30 miles south of Aleppo, built last year by a local sheikh with business interests in Iraq and strong sympathies with the resistance. It is brazenly entitled the Mujahideen Mosque.

Abdullah, originally from the Aleppo area, and the other fighters, were provided with Iraqi passports and weapons. Abdullah was given a bazooka to carry.

They were told they would be relieving Syrian mujahideen already in Iraq, part of a regular "troop" rotation, and would be expected to fight until they in turn were either killed or replaced.

In return Abdullah's family would be paid $3,000 a month by the mosque—more than most American soldiers in Iraq and a fortune in Syria where average salaries are less than 10 pounds a week.

To enter Iraq from Syria there are three border crossings. Abdullah's convoy took the most northerly, through Rabia, a dusty collection of concrete houses straddling the border, and with pictures of the former Syrian president Hafez Assad festooning the checkpoint.

Al-Jabouri tribesmen man the border. Like the al-Dulaimy tribe that guards the southern entry points into Iraq, they are deeply hostile to the US presence and Abdullah's convoy was waved through without checks.

The men were driven to a mosque in Mosul where, according to Abdullah, dozens of their fellow countrymen were staying. He would not disclose the name of the mosque, but one such building in Mosul is the Mahmud mosque, infamous for supporting the insurgency.

This squat building on the west bank of the city has seen some of the heaviest fighting between insurgents and US and Iraqi forces recently.

Sheikh Latif al-Jabouri, who runs the mosque, claims the Syrians he shelters are businessmen who come to buy and sell cars and pray. Inside the mosque, Abdullah was greeted by a former Iraqi military officer. He was assigned to a 10-man unit of Iraqi guerrillas, and the other Syrians he traveled with were spread among other units.

For the next 80 days, Abdullah and his unit went almost every day to attack American bases with mortars, or to man mujahideen checkpoints.

He took part in ambushes on US convoys. As a mine hit a patrolling Humvee, Abdullah fired a rocket-propelled grenade at the second vehicle.

He was transferred to Fallujah for three months, conducting raids with his unit in the neighboring Sunni towns of Samara and Ramadi. . . .

US and Iraqi officials believe the Syrian government has turned a blind eye to those supporting terrorists in Iraq, seeing the insurgency as an outlet for religious extremists to let off steam. . . .

Iraqi exiles in Damascus say there may be as many as 80 "mujahideen mosques" either in name or spirit supporting the resistance.

Several prominent mosques in Damascus, including the large Bilal al-Hashemi mosque, have reputations as staging posts for Syrian fighters, suggesting a logistical and financial operation beyond the ability of any one tribal leader. The US military believes there may be as many as 2,000 foreign fighters in Iraq, mostly from Syria.



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They do not operate in a vacuum. . . . At the other end of the city, thousands of members of Saddam's regime have settled in the wealthy Mezzeh district. . . . The refugees include the three sons of the former industry minister Mohammed al-Douri, on whose farm Saddam was captured in a bolthole.

It is likely that many recent arrivals have sufficient funds to finance Syrian mosques. As members of Saddam's regime some have been able to buy swaths of Damascene property which they rent out. Others live off their plundered Iraqi money. . . .

By Bush Doctrine standards, Syria is a hostile regime. It is permitting and encouraging activities that are killing not just our Iraqi friends but also, and quite directly, American troops. So we have a real Syria problem.

Of course we also have—the world also has—an Iran problem, and a Saudi problem, and lots of other problems. The Iran and Saudi problems may ultimately be more serious than the Syria problem. But the Syria problem is urgent: It is Bashar Assad's regime that seems to be doing more than any other, right now, to help Baathists and terrorists kill Americans in the central front of the war on terror.

The deputy prime minister of Iraq, Barham Saleh, wants to address the problem. He said last week, clearly referring to Syria as well as Iran, that "there is evidence indicating that some groups in some neighboring countries are playing a direct role in the killing of the Iraqi people, and such a thing is not acceptable to us."

U.S. military intelligence officials agree: They have recently concluded, according to the *Washington Post*, "that the Iraqi insurgency is being directed to a greater degree than previously recognized from Syria, where they said former Saddam Hussein loyalists have found sanctuary and are channeling money and other support to those fighting the established government."

What to do? We have tried sweet talk (on Secretary Powell's trip to Damascus in May 2003) and tough talk (on the visit three months ago by Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman and Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt). Talk has failed. Syria is a weak country with a weak regime. We now need to take action to punish and deter Assad's regime.

It would be good, of course, if Secretary Rumsfeld had increased the size and strength of our army so that we now had more options. He didn't, and we must use the assets we have. Still, real options exist. We could bomb Syrian military facilities; we could go across the border in force to stop infiltration; we could occupy the town of Abu Kamal in eastern Syria, a few miles from the border, which seems to be the planning and organizing center for Syrian activities in Iraq; we could covertly help or overtly support the Syrian opposition (pro-human rights demonstrators recently tried to take to the streets of Damascus to protest the regime's abuses). This hardly exhausts all the possible forms of pressure and coercion. But it's time to get serious about dealing with Syria as part of winning in Iraq, and in the broader Middle East.

—*William Kristol*

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# Republican Insecurity

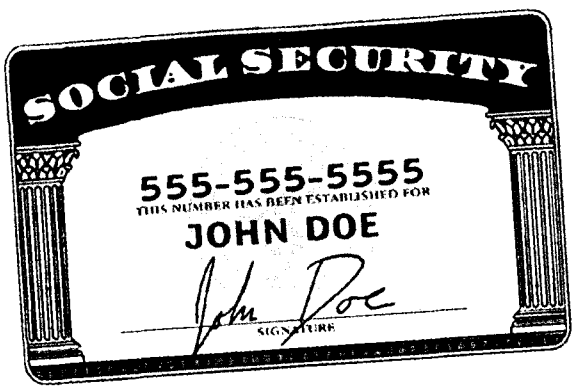
## A party divided cannot reform Social Security.

**BY FRED BARNES**

THERE'S A WORST CASE SCENARIO for Social Security reform that haunts the White House. It goes like this. With great fanfare, President Bush announces his plan for overhauling Social Security, creating private investment accounts for every American worker, and making the system solvent. He touts his proposal in his inauguration speech, the State of the Union address, and his budget. But when Bush unveils an actual bill—probably in February, maybe later in 2005—congressional Democrats scream that it would cut Social Security benefits by 40 percent. Worse for Bush, a number of prominent Republicans agree and criticize the president's plan, especially the benefits change. The result: Social Security reform is dead on arrival on Capitol Hill.

Democrats are a problem. On modernizing Social Security, most of them are reactionary liberals, committed to preserving an antiquated system. But at the moment, Republicans are an even bigger problem for the White House. For a reform measure to win approval in Congress, Republicans must be united. True, the conventional wisdom in Washington is that entitlement reform requires bipartisanship. With only a handful of Democrats likely to sign on, however, that won't happen. So that leaves the matter with Republicans, and they are anything but together.

They're divided on the two biggest reform issues: how big a chunk should be carved out of payroll taxes for individual investment accounts and whether the growth of Social Security benefits should be curtailed. In the past, the White House suggested it might settle for 2 percent accounts. In other words, workers could invest up to 2 percent of their income using money from the 6.2 percent they already pay in payroll (FICA) taxes. Now the White House is expected to go for accounts as large as 4 percent. Or—and this is under discussion—the president could opt for a phase-in, leading to 6 percent accounts in 10 years.




Most Republican reformers insist on large accounts. The bill sponsored by Senator John Sununu of New Hampshire and Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin would instantly create 6 percent accounts. And they have a strong political argument. Since there's going to be a huge fight to get any private accounts at all, why settle for a piddling 2 percent? Why not go whole-hog and get what you really want? Sununu and Ryan have significant ties to the White House, where they've made this argument.

One can imagine a compromise among Republicans on the size of the accounts. A compromise on the more contentious issue of how to treat Social Security benefits is harder to imagine. The White House intends to deal with solvency by, as best I can tell, proposing to change the way benefits are calculated. Under current law, this is done by a "wage index." But since wages grow faster than inflation, so do benefits. Absent reform, benefits will be 40 percent greater in real terms in 2050. This is a major source of the system's impending insolvency. The White House would scrap the wage index in favor of a price index, which would calculate benefits by the rate of inflation. This would save trillions and still allow the president to say his plan would guarantee the current level of benefits adjusted for inflation—but no 40 percent increase in benefits. Bush, Rove, and others in the administration believe it would be irresponsible to reform Social Security but not its financing. For one thing, Wall Street would dismiss reform. "Wall Street wants to see some spinach with the dessert," Bush aides say.

That's not what Democrats will say. In fact, John Kerry declared in the presidential campaign that Bush's "January surprise" would be a 40 percent cut in benefits. As we've noted, there's some truth to that, though reduced benefits would be offset by investment account earnings. Of course, sticking with the current rate of benefit increase would require massive borrowing or a huge tax increase or both. Republican senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina advocates 6 percent accounts paid for by boosting the cap on wages subject to payroll taxes from $87,900 to $200,000. This way, Democrats might support reform, he says. But Bush last week rejected any payroll tax hike.

Is this getting complicated? I'm afraid that can't be avoided. What's simple, though, is the argument of Republicans who want Social Security reform to consist of investment accounts alone. It's a purely political

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argument: Should Bush propose to slow the growth of benefits, Social Security reform is doomed. It just won't pass. Yes, the Democratic argument that Bush would cut benefits is demagogic. But it will generate sufficient opposition to kill any chance of reform. AARP, by the way, is already opposed.

The two camps reach beyond the White House and Congress. On the president's side is Glenn Hubbard, the former chairman of Bush's Council of Economic Advisers. Hubbard recently briefed Bush on reform issues. Others favoring action on the solvency side are influential economist Kevin Hassett of the American Enterprise Institute and ex-Bush economics adviser Larry Lindsey. Both are part of White House discussions. Opposed are Republican bigwigs Jack Kemp and Newt Gingrich, plus Steve Moore and Peter Ferrara of the Club for Growth and an unknown number of members of Congress, all of whom prefer to push for investment accounts alone. Critics call this second camp "free-lunchers."

Oh, yes. There's a third camp, those who would do nothing on Social Security because insolvency won't be a threat for a decade or more. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay has privately questioned whether it makes sense to tackle Social Security now. After all, Republicans worked for years to gain control of Congress. Why jeopardize that by provoking a fight over Social Security?

Sorry, but the fight is unavoidable. Bush made it so by emphasizing Social Security in his speech to the Republican convention last summer. At the time, he rejected advice that he scale back his plans for reform. Now he has to find a way to enlist wary Republicans. Rove has talked to both Kemp and Gingrich. Others, like Moore, may join Bush if that's the only way of getting private investment accounts. When six senators and 12 House members were briefed recently, a senior Bush aide said he "didn't sense there were a lot of free-lunchers in the room." So achieving Republican unity is possible. It's also necessary. ♦

# Another GOP Dynasty?

## Connie Mack is back in town.

**BY RACHEL DICARLO**

CONNIE MACK, son of the former senator and the Republican congressman-elect from Florida's 14th district, has much in common with President Bush. Like Bush, Mack, comes from a family with a political tradition. And, again like Bush, Mack has a name and family connections that helped him surmount a reckless youth.

Mack is even given to quoting Bush, as Josephine Hearn pointed out in a recent profile in *The Hill*. The 37-year-old politician retreats from such subjects as his two road-rage incidents involving police, the series of much-publicized barroom brawls, including one involving former Atlanta Braves outfielder Ron Gant, and the seven years it took him to finish a degree at the University of Florida, by paraphrasing Bush: "When I was young and foolish, I was young and foolish."

Mack does appear to have grown up. When I meet him at a restaurant in Capitol Hill, he is all polish and professionalism. His priorities now, he says, are his family and his new job. No fisticuffs for him these days; he says he spends his discretionary time changing his kids' diapers.

Mack first entered office in 2000 when he won a seat in Florida's legislature representing Fort Lauderdale. In the statehouse, he became the deputy majority leader for the Republicans and formed the Freedom Caucus to push for lower spending and lower taxes. Florida doesn't have a state income tax, but Mack says "any time the government puts its hands in your wallet, whether it be for a fee, a surcharge, a licensing registration, it's a tax." One of his proudest accomplishments as a state legislator was pushing through tort reform that limits what trial lawyers can take from jury awards.

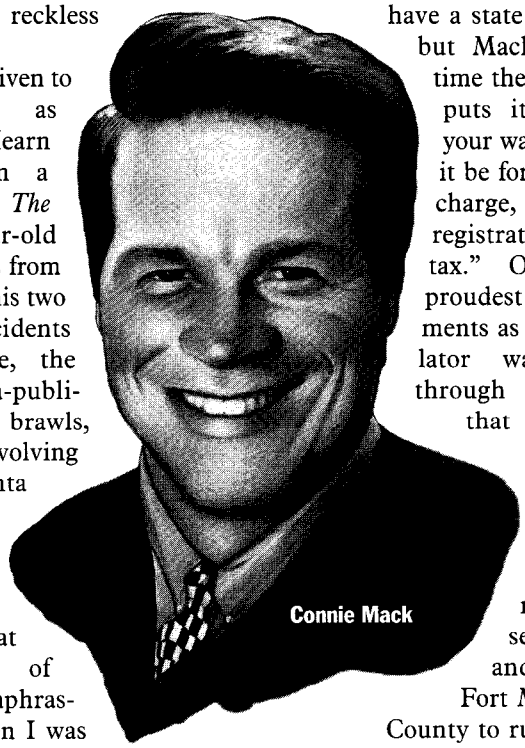
Connie Mack

Illustration by Earl Keleny

Mack resigned his seat last year, and moved to Fort Myers in Lee County to run for Porter Goss's open seat. The primary was nasty. His three opponents accused him of being a lightweight, a carpetbagger, and of trading on his father's name. Mack responded to the carpetbagger charge by pointing out that he was the only candidate in the race who was born and raised in the 14th District.

He also had to contend with a hostile press. The *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* endorsed an opponent, writing, "Even

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though, as the *Palm Beach Post* put it, 'Running against a Connie Mack in Lee County is like running against a Kennedy in Boston.' . . . Frankly, without his father's name and a campaign organization bought with money donated by his father's supporters, we doubt Mack would be a serious contender."

Mack says that when his father first ran for Congress in 1981, the older Mack was accused of trading on the name of his great-grandfather, baseball Hall of Famer and former owner of the Philadelphia Athletics Cornelius McGillicuddy, the original Connie Mack. (The onetime player's name was abbreviated, the story goes, to fit on scoreboards. Both his grandson and his great-grandson continue to use the nickname, however, while their legal names remain Cornelius McGillicuddy.) "People wondered if my father was an empty suit," Mack says. "He proved them wrong."

Yet the name helped, as Mack admits, and his family connections also helped. Mack raised $1.4 million for the race, two times as much as his closest challenger, and enough to flood southwest Florida with television ads.

But the incoming congressman insists it was gritty, old-fashioned campaign work that made the difference. "We ran a grassroots campaign. We knocked on doors, went to meet-and-greets, and attended every forum there was during the campaign." He won 36 percent of the vote, edging out his nearest rival by 4 percentage points, thus ensuring his November win in the heavily Republican 14th district.

An Irish-Catholic, Mack opposes abortion and gay marriage, but breaks with the president on federal funding for stem cell research and importing drugs from Canada—a major issue in his district, with the third highest percentage of senior citizens out of all 435 districts.

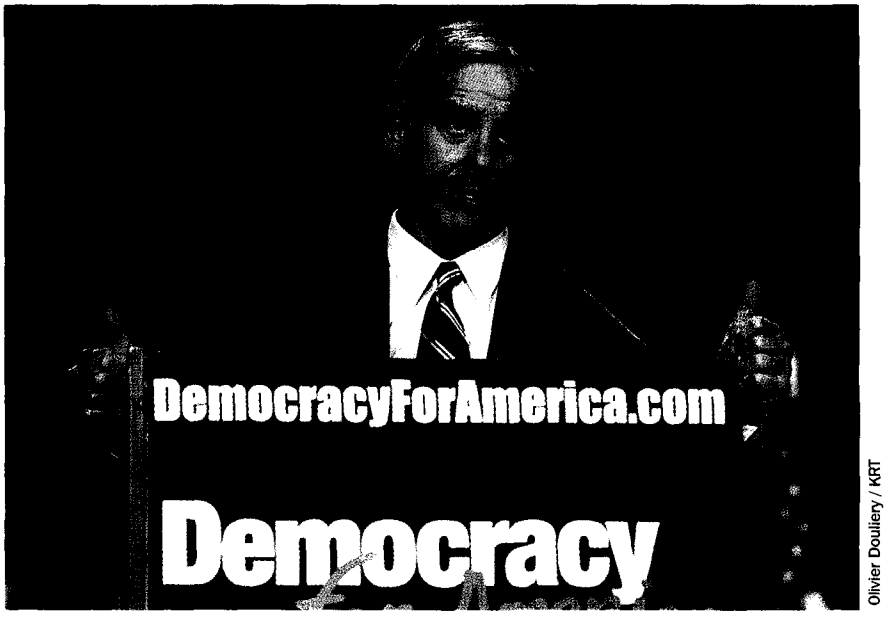
Mack has met with House leadership to discuss his agenda and is looking to sit on the science, budget, international relations, financial services, and transportation committees, where he hopes to do something about traffic congestion on I-75.

He has also met the president, with the rest of the freshman class during orientation week. "He's funny, gracious, and determined," Mack says. "He has plans for real reform." But the two men had crossed paths before, when the president was campaigning in Florida. Addressing a rally in Fort Myers, Bush drew his own comparison with the young pol. "I am proud that [Connie Mack] is running for Congress. There's nothing wrong with a son following in a father's footsteps." ♦

# Dean's December

## From a scream to a whisper in 11 months.

**BY JONATHAN V. LAST**




Olivier Douliery / KRT

HOWARD DEAN was never very good to John Kerry. On November 1, the day before the election, Dean's blog posted six lengthy entries and mentioned Kerry just twice. On Election Day, Dean's blog led with a post proclaiming "Dean, Man of the Year," and then followed with other posts about the election. Kerry's name was not mentioned until just before 7:00 P.M.

On November 3, Dean posted this bit of triumphalism: "a record number of us voted to change course—more Americans voted against George Bush than any sitting president in history. Today is not an ending. . . . While we did not get the result we wanted in the presidential race, we laid the groundwork for a new generation of Democratic leaders." Again, Dean failed to mention Kerry.

It wasn't much of a surprise—Dean never liked Kerry. Even at the Democratic convention in Boston, whenever he talked about the party's nominee, Dean was quick to add that Kerry was "only part of the solution" for fixing America. The other part of the solution was, and is, Dean himself.

Last week Dean came to Washing-

*Jonathan V. Last is online editor of* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



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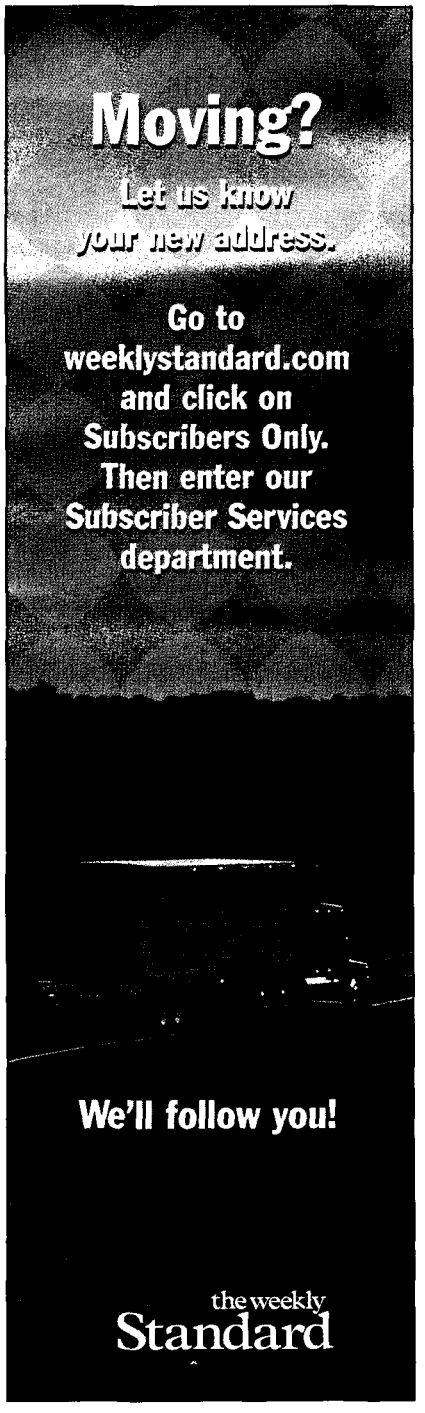
ton to hold forth on the future of his party. Looking fit and rested, he lacked the Old Testament fire that made him so popular last year. Still, he managed a few zingers, noting that Republicans want a government that "practices division" and, with the invasion of Iraq, "abdicated America's moral responsibility." Also, he insisted that "we're going to take this country back," presumably from the 61 million people who voted for George W. Bush. It goes without saying that Dean doesn't believe Bush's victory has given him a mandate. And he still doesn't like John Kerry: His only allusion to the Massachusetts senator was to say sternly, "We cannot win by being Republican Lite; we've tried it; it does not work."



Dean wasn't interested in talking specifics or ideas. He wanted to talk about "the destination," not "the direction," of the party. But then, specifics have never been his forte. Last summer he insisted that a presidential campaign was not a time to make "speeches about policies, because right now, for the next three and a half months, we've got to talk about politics."

So what is Dean's destination? He says that Democrats must become a "50-state party" again, and must fight for every vote in every county. "There are no red states or blue states," he said, because people in "red" states are actually "hungry for new ideas."

Dean was purposely vague about what these new ideas are, but it is Democrats, not Republicans, who should be alarmed by them. Unlike the other failed presidential candidates from the 2004 race, Dean hit the campaign trail pretty hard last fall—just not for John Kerry. His PAC, renamed Democracy for America, championed the "Dean Dozen": progressive candidates running for offices ranging from county constable to U.S. senator. (Don't be fooled by the name—there were 102 Dean Dozen candidates; 33 of them won.) After raising $52 million for his presidential campaign, Dean has raised only $5 million for his PAC. And he spent more than $600,000 on some 634 state and local campaigns, winning 319 of those races. It's not much, but it's a start.

The Dean plan, then, is to flood the Democratic party apparatus with Dean-supporting progressives at the local level, and then wrest control from the more centrist national Democratic establishment. Dean himself is undecided on how he should do the wresting. After speaking in Washington last week, he attended a meeting of state Democratic leaders in Orlando to audition for the job of chairman of the Democratic National Committee. A Dean aide told the *New York Times* that "the choice was between running for the chairmanship of the party, or making another bid for the presidency in 2008." As a historical footnote, the Dean-for-DNC movement was first advanced on November 3, by the far-left website *Daily Kos*.

Dean's destination politics are something of an improvement for the liberal fringe. Just a few months ago liberal activists such as John Sperling were agitating for an explicitly regional Democratic party. Don't "waste money seeking Southern votes that will never add up to one electoral vote," Sperling pleaded in his book *The Great Divide: Retro vs. Metro America*. "Stop watering down [Democratic party] policies and programs to appeal to a national constituency that no longer exists." At least Dean wants a national campaign.

But his refusal to contend with ideas is telling. Democrats are in the opening skirmishes of what may become a broad, intra-party clash. From the *New Republic* to the *Washington Monthly* to the liberal regions of the Internet, an ideological fight is brewing over whether Democrats can—or should—make fighting the war on Islamist terrorism the centerpiece of their agenda. Amidst this clamor, Dean refuses to engage.

Dean is staking his future not on ideas, but on the possession of political power. Yet it's unlikely that the former governor of Vermont will ever hold an important national office. Ruy Teixeira, coauthor of *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, downplays Dean's chances, saying that "even if [Dean] had good ideas for how to run the DNC . . . as a figurehead for the Democratic party, he would be, shall we say, undesirable."

With no clear vision, few friends in the Democratic establishment, and no political perch, Dean may wonder whether his bubble is about to burst. Again. ♦



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# The Other Special Relationship

## Koizumi goes out on a limb for Bush.

**BY DUNCAN CURRIE**

AP / J. Scott Applewhite

DURING THE 1980S, Ronald Reagan got on famously with then Japanese prime minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. Their personal comity, dubbed the "Ron-Yasu" friendship, boosted American interests on a slew of Cold War and trade issues. And, at the time, U.S.-Japan ties reached historic postwar heights.

Nakasone was a maverick, fond of the bold stroke at home and abroad. So is Japan's current prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi. His boldest stroke—supporting President Bush on the Iraq war—reflects a deeper pro-Americanism. Last Thursday, Tokyo extended its Iraq mission for another 12 months. The decision came as no surprise to anyone who's been watching U.S.-Japan relations since Koizumi took office in April 2001. Indeed, the Bush-Koizumi bond may well eclipse "Ron-Yasu"—if it hasn't already.

From day one, Bush embraced Koizumi as a vital partner. The U.S.-Japan alliance, of course, has fortified American security policy in East Asia for over 50 years. But Bush's rapport with Koizumi went further than most. "I was with President Bush at Camp David when he first met with Koizumi," says Howard Baker, the U.S. ambassador to Japan. "Almost instantly I could see that they got along well, and that they liked each other." Baker, the ex-senator who served as Reagan's chief of staff from 1987 to 1988, agrees with the parallels to Ron-Yasu. "There are a handful of 'special relationships,'" he says. "Clearly the Bush-Koizumi relationship is one of them."

Clearly indeed. Koizumi likes to brag they're on a first-name basis: "George" and "Jun." On a personal level, the two may seem an odd couple. Koizumi, 62, is a divorced bachelor who vows he'll never remarry. He's known for his spiffy clothes, flowing movie-star hair, and magnetic élan. Oh, and he loves heavy metal music, and three years ago released a CD collection of his favorite Elvis Presley tunes. (He shares a birthday with the King, January 8.) In August 2003, the PM sang an Elvis duet with actor Tom Cruise, who was in Tokyo for the premiere of *The Last Samurai*. Stack all that next to the Bush persona—family man, evangelical Christian, rugged Texan, Hollywood *bête noire*—and you have an unusual pairing.

But politically, "George-Jun" is a natural fit. Koizumi backers in Japan often compare their man to President Reagan and Lady Thatcher. That may be a stretch. Yet by any standard, Koizumi is a conservative. He's pro-military, pro-business, pro-free trade, anti-regulation, and "diehard pro-American" (as he once put it). He supports a robust foreign policy. Like Bush, he is also an ambitious reformer. He hopes to privatize Japan's postal service. He's tried to revamp its banking and pension systems. And, much to Chinese and North Korean ire, Koizumi wants to amend Japan's pacifist constitution.

Until recently, talk of constitutional revision was strictly taboo. Article 9 of Japan's 1947 constitution renounces the "use of force as means of settling international disputes," and bars Tokyo from keeping "land, sea, and air forces." The Self-Defense Forces (SDF) function as Japan's de facto military. Following a 1992 law change, which enabled the SDF to go abroad under tightly drawn condi-

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tions, Japan sent peacekeepers to Cambodia, Mozambique, Kenya/Rwanda, the Golan Heights, and East Timor. Koizumi now seeks to formally legitimize the SDF in the constitution. Last week, his ruling coalition approved a new national defense outline. Among other things, it eases self-imposed limits on arms exports, calls for deployment of missile defense, and gives the SDF greater flexibility to venture overseas.

This fits within Koizumi's broader strategy of making Japan a global player. To that end, the prime minister is willing to take risks—as he did in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, he pushed through an antiterror law that allowed Japan to give logistical and noncombat aid to Operation Enduring Freedom. Tokyo dispatched a flotilla of SDF naval vessels to the Indian Ocean, which mainly provided refueling assistance to allied forces. Then last winter, in his most controversial move, Koizumi sent more than 500 troops to help rebuild Iraq. "The U.S. is Japan's only ally," he declared. "Japan must also be a trustworthy ally to the U.S." For the past year, the SDF has done humanitarian work in the relatively quiet southern city of Samawa, under the protection of Dutch soldiers. Koizumi faced a major test in April, when, in two separate incidents, insurgents took five Japanese civilians hostage and demanded Tokyo withdraw all its troops. Koizumi didn't flinch, and the five hostages were soon released.

Another test came in late October. Insurgents kidnapped a Japanese tourist in Iraq and threatened to behead him if Tokyo didn't pull out within 48 hours. Koizumi refused to "bow to terrorism." Even after the captive, 24-year-old Shosei Koda, was brutally killed, a Kyodo News poll found that over 58 percent of Japanese approved of Koizumi's handling of the crisis. However, some 63 percent felt the SDF's Iraq mission should *not* be extended past its mid-December deadline. Thus, with his choice to prolong that mission, Koizumi bucked public opinion.

Naturally, many of Koizumi's domestic opponents say he is too pro-Bush. In October, they chided him for publicly favoring Bush's reelection. They claim the U.S.-Japan alliance is now a one-way street. These charges, if understandable, aren't wholly fair. Japan desires a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. Bush supports that goal, and his blessing is crucial. In addition, on most issues Bush and Koizumi find their interests in relative harmony. On North Korea, both endorse a hard-line approach to Kim Jong Il and promote the six-party talks, though Koizumi faces the extra concern of accounting for Japanese abductees. Likewise, both are wary of China's missile buildup along the Taiwan Straits.

*Naturally, many of Koizumi's domestic opponents say he is too pro-Bush. They claim the U.S.-Japan alliance is now a one-way street.*

Or take missile defense. Tokyo plans to develop it jointly with the United States. "We are going to deploy missile defense in a few years' time," affirms a high-ranking Japanese embassy official. Only three countries are so committed: Japan, the United States, and Israel. The roots of U.S.-Japan dialogue on antimissile technology trace back to the 1980s, but North Korea's avowal of an active nuclear program in October 2002 triggered a renewed push by Tokyo to build a system.

To be sure, snafus could always arise in U.S.-Japan relations. For one thing, the Liberal Democratic party (LDP), which has ruled Japan virtually without pause since 1955, fared poorly in upper-house elections last July. And the pacifist, Buddhist-backed New Komeito party, the LDP's coalition partner, may not go for Koizumi's military reforms or constitutional change. It's possible, though not likely, that New Komeito could defect and join with the opposition Democratic party of Japan. As of now, Koizumi's term ends in September 2006. He has pledged not to seek another.

Also, Ambassador Baker and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage—Bush's point men on Japan diplomacy—will leave their posts early next year. According to news leaks, Bush will tap Tom Schieffer, a Texas friend, for the ambassador's job. But some say Schieffer, now U.S. ambassador to Australia, lacks the proper background with Tokyo. Other potential monkey wrenches in U.S.-Japan affairs include fresh trouble in North Korea, mounting violence in Iraq, a breakdown of Japan-China ties, and tension over U.S. bases on Okinawa.

A final note about President Bush and Japan. Bush regularly cites the "transformational power of liberty" as the north star of his foreign policy. By planting the institutions of freedom, he argues, America can convert autocratic societies into friendly democracies. The experience of postwar Japan is a prime demonstration of this theory. Bush knows it. Indeed, the Japanese example became a staple of his stump speeches in the 2004 campaign. Not so long ago, Bush would say, Japan was our enemy. My dad fought the Japanese in World War II. But after the war, Harry Truman believed liberty could turn an enemy into an ally. It worked in Japan—and it will in Iraq. And someday, an American president will meet with a democratic Iraqi leader the way I now meet with Prime Minister Koizumi.

Bush knows this spiel by heart. He gave an off-the-cuff rendition of it at his November 12 press conference with Britain's Tony Blair. More than any personal chemistry between leaders, it is this historical link between nations that explains the president's emphasis on the George-Jun alliance: Bush considers Japan a living rebuke to critics of his pro-democracy strategy in the Middle East. ♦



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This year I want a year's subscription to the Weekly Standard.
It's so insightful and the parodies are really funny and when I grow up, I'm going to marry Fred Barnes.
Hi to the elves.
Lizzie

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# Mend It or End It

## Taking U.N. reform seriously.

**BY MARIO LOYOLA**

"IT IS NOT ENOUGH to denounce unilateralism," Kofi Annan told the United Nations General Assembly last year, "unless we also face up squarely to the concerns that make some states feel uniquely vulnerable, since it is those concerns that drive them to take unilateral action."

Translation: It's time for the U.N. to move beyond the gnashing of teeth and rending of garments over the Bush administration's preemptive Iraq war and do something constructive with its anti-American anger. The U.N. being what it is, Annan's next step was to appoint a panel and commission a report, which was released in early December. The most flamboyant recommendation was to enlarge the Security Council from 15 members to 24. But this is ultimately a cosmetic change, as the five veto-wielding members (the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China) would remain the same. Beyond that, the panel offered an uninspiring mix of self-criticism and anti-American sniping, even as it failed to confront the U.N.'s deepest flaw: the chronic inability of the Security Council to solve any of the problems for which it claims responsibility.

You might say that this flaw is built into the organization. When the Great Powers convened an international conference in San Francisco to adopt the U.N. Charter in 1945, they began their work with an elegant draft treaty, the *Dumbarton Oaks Proposals*, named for the gorgeous Georgetown estate where their foreign ministers had spent much of the previous summer hammering out the outlines of the new world order. The *Proposals* were a monument to the State Department's institutional talent for careful technical study and drafting precision. Alas, they emerged from the San Francisco conference mutilated, enshrining a presumption against the use of force that only the Security Council can override.

In the original draft, the use of force was presumed legitimate so long as it comported with the purposes of the new organization—which included the maintenance of international law, and the prevention and removal of threats to the peace. This would have left the legality of many kinds of wars—preemptive action, humanitarian intervention, arms control enforcement—where it belongs, in the evolving body of customary international law. But the final text reversed this presumption: It made the use of force illegal in almost all cases—no matter how necessary or justified—unless the Security Council first approves.

Instead of facilitating collective action, as the drafters had imagined, the Security Council under this new dispensation would mainly function to block the use of force by the very states for whom legitimacy matters most—the great democracies. The U.N. was conceived as a body that would make it impossible for an aggressive regime like Nazi Germany to violate treaties with impunity and arm for a war of conquest. But the San Francisco conference gave birth to a system that would have made Hitler's rise even easier.

The problem was recognized by at least some of the delegates; hence the existence of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which preserves an "inherent right of . . . self-defense if an armed attack occurs." But Article 51 would be void for vagueness if it were within the power of any court to declare it so. What, after all, is an "inherent right" if you are specifying *by treaty* the only situation in which it can be exercised?

Kofi Annan's panel cheerfully concludes that "Article 51 needs neither extension nor restriction of its long-understood scope." In fact its scope has never been understood. The cacophony of scholarly opinion on the meaning of Article 51 is dizzying. The only thing everyone agrees on is that the provision cannot mean what it plainly says. As the panel recognizes, states have long claimed the right to preempt an imminent attack. But the reason for this is not that the Charter graciously permits them to, but rather that most of the Charter didn't survive contact with reality. Accommodating the preemption of imminent attacks is not a legal interpretation of the Charter. It is desuetude, and few treaties have ever deserved it more.

Franklin D. Roosevelt understood that the anti-Axis alliance, organized as a permanent coalition of United Nations, could be a pillar of global security. What most closely approximates his vision, though, is not the U.N. but NATO. Roosevelt never dreamed that the Security Council would be the exclusive forum for determining the legitimacy of military force. That issue was put to rest in the negotiations leading to the Moscow Declaration of 1943, in which a requirement for unanimous Great Power agreement before any one of them could resort to military action was rejected out of hand. What they agreed was to use force according to common principles, and after joint consultation—which is the basic idea of the *Dumbarton Oaks Proposals*.

Alas, Roosevelt died a few months too soon, and the finishing touches on the U.N. were left to a pair of Midwesterners—Harry Truman and Arthur Vandenberg—who were as idealistic as they were simple-minded. Truman dreamed of creating a Parlia-

*Mario Loyola last wrote for* THE WEEKLY STANDARD *on the death of Yasser Arafat.*



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ment of Man, and this almost childish fantasy lives on in the U.N.'s claim for itself not only of "unique legitimacy" but also, even more improbably, success. In his 2003 speech to the General Assembly, Kofi Annan intimated that America was challenging the system that had preserved international law and world peace for nearly 60 years. This is a fantastical denial of history. It is the United States that has preserved some semblance of order in the world for the past 60 years, while the U.N. dedicated itself chiefly to abusing Israel.

Those who think (or hope) that the U.N. will fade into irrelevance fail to consider the enormous and very valuable benefits the Charter confers on aggressive outlaw states. The most important of these is the elimination of what lawyers call "self-help" enforcement: the right to enforce one's rights unilaterally. Before the Charter came into existence, your violation of a treaty triggered my right to enforce the terms of the treaty by force. Today I need the Security Council's permission. This encourages violators to do as they please and hide behind the Charter, knowing that law-abiding states will face an unpleasant choice between legitimacy and security.

The problem's roots go deeper than many U.N critics realize: The United Nations is in a sense systematically destroying international law. In his magisterial 1950 commentary on the U.N. Charter, the Austrian-American jurist Hans Kelsen wrote, "To the extent a Member is deprived of its right of self-help, enforcement action of the Organization must actually take place, otherwise the Organization constitutes, instead of an improvement, a dangerous deterioration in the content of general international law." The reason is simple: A rule that carries no penalty for violations does not rise to the level of law and is at best merely a voluntary norm.

Consider the International Atomic Energy Agency's disastrous Iran policy. Here the Annan panel report makes among the most intelligent of all its recommendations: It adopts President Bush's far-reaching proposals for reform of the nonproliferation regime. The panel recognizes that enrichment and reprocessing capabilities constitute a threat, even though they may technically be legal under the nonproliferation treaty.

But again, the proposals fail to address the root of the problem, which is the lack of effective enforcement. The panel sheepishly recommends that the U.N. "do a better job" of dealing with enforcement, but it is crucial to grasp that the failure is not, as Kofi Annan would have it, one of political will. The problem is structural. If the nonproliferation treaty does not provide for automatic enforcement, the only way that the "obligations" it enshrines can have the character of law is if the IAEA establishes penalties as a matter of custom. Instead, in its nonresponse to several years of disclosure violations by the government of Iran, the IAEA has established as a matter of custom that the disclosure rules will not be enforced.

*Before the Charter came into existence, your violation of a treaty triggered my right to enforce the terms of the treaty by force.*

The panel report is not entirely vapid. Its discussion of "Collective Security and the Use of Force" is a brazen attempt to seize control of our national security policy—and impose on us a policy of appeasement, no less. The panel observes that those concerned with gathering threats should go to the Security Council, "which can authorize [preemptive] action if it chooses to. If it does not so choose, there will be . . . time to pursue other strategies, including persuasion, negotiation, deterrence, and containment." The panel insists that we wait until an attack is imminent, ignoring the fact that in an age of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, we can no longer know that an attack is imminent.

For all the report's failings, it would be wrong to dismiss its importance. Norms are developing in the international system that are dangerously inimical to U.S. security, and we must push back. Kofi Annan, whose anti-Americanism has been greatly exaggerated (by his own press office, among others), has now given us an opportunity to do just that.

The Bush administration might do worse than to take these proposals as an opening to return to Dumbarton Oaks. We should court our democratic partners in the U.N. enterprise to see how much of the original concept can be revived. And we should remind them of the argument France made in opposition to the Charter's final text: *States must be free to act when the Security Council fails to act.*

The U.S. government has long asserted this right. But the legal arguments it has advanced to justify it are simply attempts to fit a round peg in a square hole. Under international law, a legal argument is only as valuable as its diplomatic effect, and most diplomats today think that U.S. national security policies are at odds with international law. Something in that equation needs to change, and it isn't U.S. national security strategy.

The U.N. is sapping America's prestige, tying us down in Lilliputian legal restraints whose origins and logic are never questioned. To hope that the U.N. will go the way of the League of Nations ignores the vital force America has imparted to it over the last 60 years. Our creation has become a hostile power, one that profoundly distorts the natural power patterns of international security, and protects the gestation of the most terrifying threats we have ever faced. The U.N. should either be reformed to serve the purposes of its founding, or we should kill it off once and for all. Whichever you prefer, the numbingly tepid report of Kofi Annan's panel may just prove to be an opportunity in disguise. ♦



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# A Lobbyist's Progress

## *Jack Abramoff and the end of the Republican Revolution*

**By Andrew Ferguson**

In honor of the tenth anniversary of the fabled Republican Revolution—for precisely a decade has flown by since Republicans took control of the House of Representatives, following forty years of Democratic darkness—let us pause from our noise-making and silly-hat-wearing to ponder the story of Jack Abramoff and Michael Scanlon. They have lately been much in the news.

Abramoff was until recently a registered lobbyist, and Scanlon offers himself as a public affairs specialist, but more precisely they are what Republicans in Washington used to call "Beltway Bandits," profiteers who manipulate the power of big government on behalf of well-heeled people who pay them tons of money to do so. Sometime around 1995, Republicans in Washington stopped using the term "Beltway Bandits."

Roll Call Photos / Tom Williams

*Taking the Fifth: Abramoff at the Sept. 29 Senate hearings*

But they still exist, and how, and if you're a bandito of the Beltway variety, being "in the news" is a delicate matter. You want to be in the news, but not too much in the news. When the low-circulation, high-impact Washington magazine *National Journal* labels you, as it did Abramoff a couple years ago, "an object of awe on K Street," then that's exactly the kind of news you want to be in. (K Street, in downtown Washington, is where all the lobbyists have offices, just as securities traders used to be confined to Wall Street and drunks to Skid Row.) And when the low-circulation, high-impact Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call* underscores your close connections to powerful House Republicans, as it did for Scanlon a while back, that's excellent news to be in, too. But when, on the other hand, the high-circulation, high-impact *Washington Post* runs stories underneath headlines that say: "Lobbyist Quits as Firm Probes Work with Tribe," followed by "Ex-Lobbyist is Focus of Widening Investigations," well, then, you know you are too much in the wrong kind of news.

For Abramoff and Scanlon, the wrong kind of news has only intensified in the last couple months. In September and then in November, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held hearings on the pair's relations with a half-dozen Indian tribes who had hired them. Indian tribes have become big clients on K Street, believe it or not. In 1988, Congress authorized, and then established regulations over, casino gambling on Indian reservations. The result, from a lobbyist's perspective, couldn't have been happier. Gambling had two main effects. It made some tribes very rich—Indian casinos bring in as much as $30 million a month—and it permanently entangled those gambling tribes with a Washington bureaucracy that seemed, to an outsider anyway, at once all-powerful and impossible to understand. In hopes of not getting squashed by the sozzled federal giant it's gotten in bed with, a gambling tribe eager to defend its interests may spend $20,000 a month or more to retain the services of a Washington lobbying firm.

At least, that's the way it looked until the Abramoff story broke in the *Post*, and the world discovered that the $20,000 figure was for chumps. Several things are striking about the Abramoff story, as it has unfolded in the *Post* and in the documents released through the Senate investigation. One is the sheer lusciousness of the numbers involved. First-tier lobbying firms in Washington might bill a total of $20 million in fees a year. The Senate committee has reported that Abramoff and his partner Scanlon split as much as $82 million in fees from six tribes over three years. That figure doesn't include the additional millions that Abramoff told tribes to donate to charitable and

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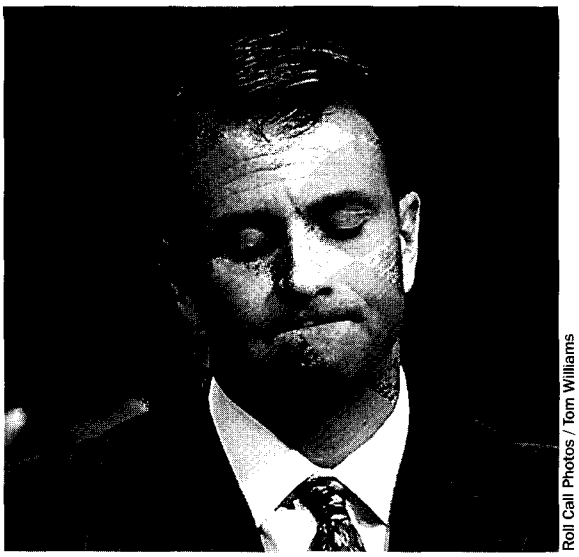
political organizations. Moreover, these fees were collected during a period when Congress was considering scarcely any Indian-related legislation at all.

And then there is the identity of the people involved. For 25 years Abramoff has been a key figure in the conservative movement that led to the 1994 Republican Revolution, which once promised "to drain the swamp" in Washington, D.C. Abramoff is mentor and close friend to the prominent activist Grover Norquist, and to Ralph Reed, founder of the Christian Coalition, highly successful political operative, and self-advertised adviser to the Bush White House. Both Reed and Norquist, in fact, lead organizations that were recipients of the tribes' generosity, through Abramoff's intercession.

All of these factors combine to make Abramoff's story worth pondering. They also go a long way towards explaining why Republicans in Washington stopped using the term "Beltway Bandits" sometime around 1995.

Jack Abramoff is 45. He grew up in Beverly Hills, son of a Diners Club executive, and went to college at Brandeis. A shared passion for conservative activism—not the most common passion in 1980 in Massachusetts—led him to a friendship with Norquist, a Harvard graduate student, and together they organized students for the 1980 Reagan campaign in their state, which Reagan, miraculously, carried. After graduation they launched a campaign to take over a sleepy, Washington-based subsidiary of the Republican National Committee called College Republicans. Abramoff spent $10,000 of personal money winning the chairmanship. With Norquist as executive director, he transformed CR into a "right-wing version of a communist cell—complete with purges of in-house dissenters and covert missions to destroy the enemy left," as Nina Easton puts it in her useful history, *Gang of Five*.



Roll Call Photos / Tom Williams

Easton's sensibility may seem a bit delicate, but she well captures the revolutionary mood among the young idealists who came to Washington after Reagan's inauguration in 1981, among whom Abramoff and Norquist were the loudest and most energetic. They were soon joined by Reed, freshly graduated from the University of Georgia and looking even younger then than he does now, if you can imagine. Borrowing tactics from their leftist counterparts, College Republicans were particularly good at dramatizing the causes of limited government and anti-communism. When the Soviet Union invaded Poland, they swarmed the Polish embassy in Washington and burned the Soviet flag for news cameras. They staged counter-demonstrations to those put on by the useful idiots of the nuclear-freeze movement. At late-night gatherings they sang age-old anarchist anthems that Norquist had taught them. You could tell a College Republican by the buttons he wore: "There's no government like no government," for example.

After College Republicans, Abramoff brought the same theatricality to his other activist jobs. "His greatest strength was his audacity," says the writer and political consultant Jeff Bell, who worked with Abramoff and Norquist at a Reaganite group called Citizens for America in the mid-1980s. "He and Grover were just wildmen. They always were willing to throw the long ball. Jack's specialty was the spectacular—huge, larger-than-life, almost Hollywood-like events." As the group's chairman, Abramoff staged his greatest spectacular in 1985, a "summit meeting" of freedom-fighters from around the world, held in a remote corner of the African bush. Among the summiteers was Adolfo Calero, a leader of the Nicaraguan contras, and playing host was a favorite of the 1980s conservative movement, the Angolan rebel Jonas Savimbi, who fought bravely against the Cuban occupiers of his country but turned out, alas, to be a Maoist cannibal. In her book Easton reports that both Abramoff and Norquist, who had been hired as Abramoff's assistant, were later dismissed from CFA for "lavish spending."

As the Reagan years wound down, the conservative movement's anti-communism, and the Reagan Doctrine it had encouraged, were being vindicated by the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Abramoff left Washington to become, improbably, a movie producer. In 1989, he produced *Red Scorpion*, an action thriller about anti-Communist guerrillas fighting and sweating in the African jungle. ("He's a human killing machine," said the advertisements. "Taught to stalk. Trained to kill. Programmed to destroy. He's played by their rules . . . Until now.") The movie starred Dolph Lundgren, who before drifting into total obscurity was a poor man's Jean Claude Van Damme, who was a poor man's Arnold Schwarzenegger. It was later reported that



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Ultimately, as you can imagine, the main target is the AC.  I wish those moronic Tiguas
were smarter in their political contributions.  I'd love us to get our mitts on that
moolah!!  Oh well, stupid folks get wiped out.  Now let's get AC.
-----Original Message-----
From: Ralph Reed [mailto:ralph[redacted]
Sent: Monday, February 11, 2002 1:56 PM
To:   Jack Abramoff [redacted]
Subject:    Texas
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*Red Scorpion* was financed in part by the white South African government, which had also subsidized Savimbi, as well as an international student conference Abramoff had put on in the mid-1980s. *Red Scorpion* was followed by *Red Scorpion 2*. According to jellyneckr, a reviewer on the Internet Movie Database website, *Red Scorpion 2* is even better than *Red Scorpion*.

The Republican victory in 1994 brought Abramoff back to Washington. "A year ago," *National Journal* wrote in 1995, "Abramoff was an obscure motion picture producer . . . and a political activist with a reputation only in the conservative camp. But in a Washington turned upside down by the 1994 elections, Abramoff has emerged as one of the biggest winners." The way a winner knows he's won is by cashing in his chips, and the press enthusiastically listed Abramoff's chips—the newly powerful Republican officeholders with whom he had longstanding ties, including Newt Gingrich and Tom DeLay. "He has access to DeLay," DeLay's press secretary helpfully told *National Journal*. That's the good way of being in the news again—the kind of quote, as Abramoff was soon to discover, that's worth tens of thousands of dollars in fees.

Abramoff joined the law-lobbying firm of Preston Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds (the name partner Gates is the father of Bill Gates) and later moved to the firm Greenberg Traurig. In both offices he was assisted by Scanlon, who had worked for DeLay as press secretary. Scanlon eventually left Greenberg to strike out on his own, relying on Abramoff for business referrals. And from the start there was a lot of business to go around. One of Abramoff's greatest early successes as a lobbyist was won on behalf of the casino-owning Choctaw tribe. Indian casino profits had been exempted from taxation, and when some in Congress suggested taxing them, just as the government taxes casino profits from Las Vegas and elsewhere, Abramoff managed to convince the Republican leadership that such a tax would be an outrageous violation of Republican principle. The issue nicely demonstrated the elasticity of conservative ideology when properly deployed. Any tax of any kind on Indians, Abramoff argued, would contradict the anti-tax position that had become a marker of House Republicans. The Indian reservations, bolstered by gambling, could serve instead as "free market laboratories"—a "low-tax, unregulated, sovereign economic model for communities around the nation." Moreover, Abramoff told his fellow Republicans, casino profits would wean Indians from their unhealthy dependence on Washington.

Abramoff's ingenuity quickly earned him a reputation as the premier lobbyist for Indians in Washington—though he only worked for casino-owning tribes, who were, after all, the only "free market laboratories" that could afford Washington lobbyists. He regularly arranged fact-finding trips for congressmen and their staffs to the casinos, especially those with golf courses.

Abramoff told the *Post* earlier this year that those Indian tribes "are engaged in the same ideological and philosophical efforts that conservatives are—basically saying, 'Look, we want to be left alone.'" Abramoff was echoing his old friend Norquist, who has dubbed the conservative movement, in its present manifestation, "the leave us alone coalition." Norquist has worked on behalf of casino tribes, too, and they have donated generously to his group Americans for Tax Reform, sometimes at Abramoff's insistence. And we should add that the tribes don't want to be left alone, you know, *all* the time. Abramoff has also bragged of the millions of tax dollars he has snagged for his Indian clients, in the form of more conventional pork-barrel appropriations for roads, schools, water projects, sewers, and the rest.

In Beltway lobbying, as elsewhere, diversification is the key to success. It is essential for a lobbyist like Abramoff—who boasts of his passion for ideology—to stretch his conservative arguments over as wide a variety of clients as possible. Channel One, the for-profit TV channel that pumps commercial-laden programming into public school classrooms, hired both Reed and Abramoff in the late 1990s to defend it against conservative criticism. Abramoff dismissed the channel's right-wing opponents for pursuing "an anti-free-market, anticommercial agenda." The textile industry in the Marianas islands, a U.S. protectorate, hired Abramoff when congressional Democrats tried to impose U.S. labor regulations on its sweatshops, where low-wage workers imported from China and the Philippines produced garments marked "Made in the USA." Abramoff arranged trips to the islands, where there was also a nice golf course. Among other congressional Republicans and



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Democrats, DeLay toured the sweatshops and pronounced the islands "a perfect Petri dish of capitalism." Before 9/11, Abramoff lobbied for the dictatorships in Pakistan and Malaysia. After 9/11, according to *National Journal*, he signed up as lobbyist for the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions, a consortium of banks that operate according to *sharia*, or Islamic law.

None of this lucrative representation—I hurry to note—would raise an eyebrow among the capital's well-heeled political class. Democratic lobbyists have fattened off Washington for years. Abramoff was merely the first Republican to discover that pretending to advance the interests of conservative small-government could, for a lobbyist, be as insanely lucrative as pretending to advance the interests of liberal big-government; in reality, of course, lobbyists advance their own interests above all. It helped, too, when conservatives revised their philosophical commitments to embrace the nonsensical neologism "big government conservatism." Given this ideological elasticity, it was only a matter of time before Republicans achieved "parity" on K Street as they have in the country at large. No K Street firm can long endure without being half-Republican—thanks in large part to the exertions of Jack Abramoff.

Not surprisingly, then, it took an outsider to notice something fishy about the dealings between Indians and Abramoff.

In September 2003, a reporter for the daily *Town Talk* in Alexandria, Louisiana, wrote a story about a local Indian tribe, the Louisiana Coushattas, who run a casino in nearby Kinder. An internal audit, the reporter learned, had revealed that the tribe had been spending an inordinate sum on Washington lobbyists. In one year's time, they had paid $13.7 million to Michael Scanlon's firm Capitol Campaign Strategies, another half million to a "think tank" called the American International Center, $2.4 million to Abramoff's firm Greenberg Traurig, and another $485,000 to Abramoff himself. Though the tribe's casino generates about $300 million a year, the tribal government was running a $40 million deficit, and no tribe member, according to the newspaper, could quite explain what the lobbyists had done for the money. With a follow-up a month later, the *Town Talk* story found its way into the email queues of Washington lobbyists early this year, and eventually inspired the stories in the *Washington Post*, which inspired the Senate hearings.

Abramoff and Scanlon appeared at the hearings separately, and both refused to answer questions, invoking the Fifth Amendment. True to Senate traditions, however, their presence at the hearings was not really meant to elicit information; the two witnesses were there mostly so senators could browbeat them before the television cameras. "I don't know how you go to sleep at night," said Sen. Kent Conrad, in a typical rebuke.

In truth, Conrad's point was well taken. The story lines put together by the committee's investigators, and especially the emails and memos they released as evidence, show a riot of presumption and greed on the part of Abramoff, Scanlon, and Reed. The activities covered by the committee involved six tribes. With variations from tribe to tribe, Abramoff and Scanlon's basic method in dealing with clients was this: Abramoff would urge a tribe to hire Scanlon for assistance in a "grass-roots" activity—helping to organize a tribal election, for example, or ginning up a letter-writing campaign to state legislators or congressional lawmakers. Scanlon would usually subcontract out the work, and collect the fees. These in turn would be shared with Abramoff—unbeknownst to the tribes or to Abramoff's own firm. Over three years, the tribes paid at least $66 million to Scanlon's firm, Capital Campaign Strategies. At least $21 million of that was then routed to Abramoff.

"Jack Abramoff owed the tribes he represented a duty to disclose his financial stake in the multimillion dollar contract he was steering Michael Scanlon's way," said Sen. John McCain in an opening statement. McCain's dudgeon assumes that there is a code of honor among lobbyists that Abramoff had somehow breached. If such a code exists, it's not often consulted. There was, however, a legal logic behind the secrecy. By law anyone who spends at least 20 percent of his billable hours meeting with government officials on behalf of a client is a lobbyist. (Hence the wry Washington axiom: A lobbyist spends 20 percent of his time lobbying the government, 80 percent lobbying his client.) Lobbyists must publicly disclose their clients and fees. Abramoff is a lobbyist.

But Scanlon is not. He is a "political consultant," a "public affairs strategist," a "media relations specialist"—in Washington these phony-baloney job titles are interchangeable. As such he doesn't have to disclose his fees and clients. By directing Abramoff's clients to hire Scanlon, who then charged them enormous fees, the two men could make as much money as possible without having to disclose anything.

One 2003 email from Abramoff to his accountant and released by the committee gave a small example of how the swag was divided:

"I think I understand what he [Scanlon] did. We received $5 million into CCS . . . he divided the $5 million into three piles: $1 M for actual expenses, and $2 M for each of us."

It helped, too, that there were several conduits the money could pass through. The most colorful, and myste-



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rious, of these was Scanlon's think tank, the American International Center, into which the tribes paid millions of dollars. The prestige of real think tanks in Washington, quasi-academic research groups like the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, has greatly increased the popularity of the term. Almost anything can be called a think tank nowadays. Scanlon started his in 2001. It's set up in a large house he bought (for $4.2 million, according to the *Post*) two blocks from the ocean, at the resort community of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. A reporter for *National Journal* visited its website shortly before it was taken down. The AIC, said the website, had the "global minded purpose of enhancing the methods of empowerment for territories, commonwealths, and sovereign nations in possession of and within the United States." Further, it sought "to expand the parameters of international discourse in an effort to leverage the combined power of world intellect." Living in the beach house were the two resident scholars: David Grosh had been named Rehoboth's "lifeguard of the year" in 1995, and Brian Mann, the *Post* reported, is a former yoga instructor.

Another recipient of the tribe's generosity was the Capital Athletic Foundation, a charitable organization founded by Abramoff and used to support a private boys school he opened in Maryland, the Eshkol Academy. Both Eshkol and the foundation are now defunct. When one of Abramoff's tribes, the Tigua of El Paso, Texas, had trouble paying its retainer, the lobbyist came up with an innovative solution—a "brand new deal," as he put it to the tribe's representative, Marc Schwartz. Abramoff suggested an "elderly legacy program": The tribe would take out term life insurance on its oldest members, naming the school as beneficiary. As the oldsters dropped off and the money rolled in, the school would pay Abramoff's retainer out of the proceeds. "Once the group of tribal elders has completed [a medical] exam and are accepted by the insurance company," Abramoff explained in a memo, "the financing phase will commence immediately." According to Schwartz, the elders of the tribe declined the arrangement. Too morbid, they said.

Because Abramoff and Scanlon have not yet had a chance to present their rebuttal to the committee's evidence, it's still unclear what services they performed in exchange for the millions they received. But the committee was able to illuminate one original mystery—why the Louisiana Coushatta tribe hired the pair to begin with.

As we've seen, Abramoff prized casino tribes as "low-tax sovereign economic models." But even "laboratories of free enterprise" don't like competition. Often tribes hired Abramoff to make sure that other tribes did not develop their own sovereign economic models which might drain away business. When three rival tribes in neighboring Texas opened casinos, drawing customers away from their casino in Kinder, the Louisiana Coushattas hired Abramoff and Scanlon. Their idea was to prod Texas Republicans to shut down the new casinos, either through the Texas legislature or the courts. Scanlon promised to launch a "grass-roots campaign" to pressure the Texans.

And he enlisted Abramoff's old colleague Ralph Reed to help. Since their salad days together in College Republicans, Reed had learned to prosper in politics as Abramoff had. His firm, Century Strategies, specializes in "Strategic Business Development Assistance, Organizational Development, Direct Mail and Voter Contact Services, Fundraising Management, Research and Analysis, Creative Media Planning, Public and Media Relations, and List Management and Procurement." Whatever these terms may mean, they're expensive.

Though not yet as rich as his mentor, Reed is far more famous, and far more careful with his reputation. As a pillar among conservative evangelicals and an ardent foe of gambling, Reed refuses to take casino tribes as clients. The tribes therefore hired Scanlon, who hired Reed. Century Strategies was paid at least $4.2 million to organize a grass-roots campaign—working phone banks, writing letters—to shut down the Texas tribes' casinos and, as Reed put it in one email, "get our pastors riled up." Half of the $4.2 million sum received by Reed's firm came from the American International Center, the think tank on the beach. Sure enough, in February 2002, the Texas casinos were shuttered by a Texas court, acting pursuant to an order sought by the Texas attorney general John Cornyn (now a U.S. senator).

The Texas tribes were devastated, of course, but Abramoff was energized. Shortly after the court order, through an intermediary, he approached one of the tribes,

-----Original Message-----
From: Mike Scanlon [mailto:mike[redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, February 06, 2002 11:40 AM
To: abramoffj[redacted]
Subject: RE: i'm on the phone with Tigua!

I want all their MONEY!!!

-----Original Message-----
From: abramoffj[redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, February 06, 2002 10:54 AM
To: Mike Scanlon
Subject: i'm on the phone with Tigua!

Fire up the jet baby, we're going to El Paso!!



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the Tigua of El Paso, offering to use his lobbying magic in Washington to get their casino reopened. The Tigua had no way of knowing that Abramoff and Scanlon had been involved in the campaign to shut down their casino.

On February 6, 2002, Abramoff emailed Scanlon under the header *I'm on the phone with Tigua*: "Fire up the jet, baby, we're going to El Paso!"

Scanlon responded: "I want all their MONEY!!!"

A few days later, Abramoff, in a more sober mood, addressed a proposal to a Tigua representative via email. "Our motivations for this representation are manifold," Abramoff wrote. He wanted to protect "tribal sovereignty," he said. "While we are Republicans and normally want all Republicans to prevail in electoral challenges, this ill-advised decision on the part of the Republican leadership in Texas must not stand. And we intend to right this using, in part, Republican leaders from Washington."

Abramoff himself offered to help the Tigua for free—on two conditions. One, that "if we succeed, we can expect to have a long-term relationship with the tribe by representing their interests on the federal level"; and two, that the Tigua hire Michael Scanlon for "grass-roots lobbying." "He's the best there is in the business." Cost: $4.2 million.

The emails released by the committee, with their schoolyard vulgarities and adolescent chest-thumping, titillated Washington for days after excerpts were published in the *Post* this fall. (Abramoff to Reed: "I'd love us to get our mitts on that moolah!!") And the brazenness of the Abramoff-Scanlon maneuver with the Tigua—pushing the state government to shut down the tribe's casino, then offering to lobby the federal government to reopen it—was a jolt even to the most hardened Washington observers. (The emails and other documents can be seen in their entirety at the committee's website: *www.indian.senate.gov*.)

Yet as often happens in the capital's lobbying culture, what's really fascinating isn't what's exceptional but what's typical. For apart from its price tag, which even lobbyists agree was excessive, the lobbying effort launched by Abramoff and Scanlon for the Tigua was perfectly ordinary. Indeed, it's almost a textbook case of the sly manipulation of federal power on behalf of those who are willing to pay up—with the middlemen as the ultimate beneficiaries.

On February 18, 2002, Scanlon and Abramoff flew by chartered jet to present the Tigua their proposal for "Operation Open Doors." In its breathless tone, its bogus self-confidence, its pompous phrasing, the document is a towering monolith of Beltway Baloney.

> The singular objective of our strategy is to open the doors of the Speaking Rock Casino within the next 4 months. . . .
>
> This political operation will result in a Majority of both federal chambers either becoming close friends of the tribe or fearing the tribe in a very short period of time. Simply put you need 218 friends in the U.S. House and 51 Senators on your side very quickly, and we will do that through both love and fear.

The idea was to persuade some accommodating lawmaker to attach a few sentences to an otherwise unrelated piece of legislation. The language would alter the tribe's federal charter, override the ruling of the Texas court, and make the tribe once again eligible to operate a casino.

And yet! "Make no mistake: the true value of this strategy is not the legislation. Quiet [sic] frankly the legislative solution itself is not what one would call rocket science." Generating "political support," however, *is* rocket science—and easily as expensive as anything NASA ever dreamed up. It involved constant polls, activated phone banks, and two (2) "fully customized databases"—one "Grassroots Database" and one "Qualitative Research Database"—"containing every piece of information fathomable." According to the committee, Abramoff and Scanlon also provided the tribe with a list of political "targets"—Republican congressmen, senators, political action committees, and organizations, such as Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform and Abramoff's Capital Athletic Foundation, to which they insisted the tribe give money. "If you execute this strategy in its entirety, your doors will be open and gaming [Indian for *gambling*] will return in the immediate future."

A few days after Abramoff and Scanlon's presentation to the Tigua, the El Paso newspaper ran a story about the closing of their casino: "450 Casino Employees Officially Terminated."

Via email, Scanlon sent the story to Abramoff. "This is the front page of todays paper while they will be voting on our plan!"

Abramoff fired back: "Is life great or what!!!!"

But some things in life are too good to be true. Though the tribal council approved the plan and paid the money, in the end the Tigua "fix" didn't work out. The rocket science failed. For one thing, Scanlon's firm farmed out the database work to a subcontractor who charged less than $100,000, even though records obtained by the committee show that Scanlon charged the tribe $1.8 million for it. But even the sub-rocket science, the legislative solution, didn't work. It was not for lack of trying.

First Abramoff and Scanlon had to find a bill on which they could tack their "language." Abramoff emailed a subordinate: "I need to know asap which pieces of legislation are likely to be passed through both House and Senate in the next three months. . . . How do we find



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silly little things which are moving which can have some technical corrections language attached?" In March 2002 they settled on an election reform bill, a silly little thing sponsored by Rep. Bob Ney, another onetime revolutionary from the House Republican Class of '94 and now firmly settled in the House leadership. Ney had also, just the month before, seen his chief of staff take a lucrative lobbying job with . . . Jack Abramoff. Abramoff emailed Scanlon the good news: "Just met with Ney!!! We're f'ing gold!!!!! He's going to do Tigua."

In a statement, Ney now says he was "duped by Jack Abramoff." But by all accounts, including one last week in *Roll Call*, it was a curious duping.

Ney says Abramoff had assured him that the Senate sponsor of the election reform bill, Sen. Christopher Dodd, would support the inclusion of the Tigua language. Indeed, Scanlon had already paid off three Democratic lobbyists, including a member of Dodd's campaign finance committee, to persuade Dodd to accept the insertion. In April, Abramoff took Tigua officials to meet Ney. The meeting lasted nearly two hours. Ney, one of the Tigua representatives testified, "was extremely animated about Mr. Abramoff and his ability as a representative lobbyist in the city [and] he had tremendous sympathy for the plight that the tribe had gone through." A few days later, the Tigua donated $30,000 to PACs controlled by Ney.

Just met with Ney!!! We're f'ing gold!!!!

-----Original Message-----
From: Mike Scanlon [redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2002 6:11 PM
To: abramoffj[redacted]
Subject: RE: Florida baby!!

Then the Tigua got stingy. They declined to pay $50,000 to finance a skybox—all good lobbyists have skyboxes—for Abramoff at a Washington sports arena. In June, Abramoff emailed the Tigua again: "Our friend . . . asked if you could help (as in cover) a Scotland golf trip for him and some staff (his committee chief of staff) for August. The trip will be quite expensive (we did this for another member—you know who) 2 years ago. Let me know if you guys could do $50k . . . they would probably do the trip through the Capital Athletic Foundation as an educational mission." Already short of cash, the Tigua declined.

In July, Ney heard from Dodd that the senator would not support the inclusion of the Tigua language. "I had been misled by Jack Abramoff," Ney has said in his statement. "The matter was then closed from my perspective." A week later, however, he and the lobbyist had patched things up. Ney flew to Scotland on a chartered jet with Abramoff, another lobbyist, an official of the General Services Administration, and their friend Ralph Reed. They played golf at St. Andrews. Abramoff had found someone else to pay for the trip. The Tigua never did get their "fix."

A funny thing happens when you talk to lobbyists, especially those with Indian casino clients, about the Senate investigation of Abramoff and Scanlon. None of them will talk for the record, of course, but they are surprisingly unanimous that all this unpleasantness will soon blow over.

"I think that story has about run its course," one told me the other day. "Really, after you get past Jack's excesses—which are Jack's—there's not much there."

"I'm hearing there won't be any more hearings," another told me. "It's done. They've nailed Jack. End of story."

This is just wishful thinking, though. The new chairman of the Indian Affairs committee, Sen. McCain, has made it clear he has much more material to ventilate in hearings that will continue next year. But the lobbyists' defensiveness is understandable. Stripped of its peculiar grossness, Abramoff's Indian story really is just another story of business as usual in the world of Washington lobbying, and the longer hearings like McCain's drag on, the more likely it is that even the Republican "grass-roots" will wise up. That closed, parasitic culture of convenience—with its revolving doors, front groups, pay-offs, expense-account comfort, and ideological cover stories—is as essential to the way Republican Washington works, ten years after the Revolution, as ever it was to Democratic Washington.

In an interview about Abramoff for National Public Radio a couple months ago, his old friend Norquist said, "To this day I can't find anything he did or he's accused of doing that's illegal, immoral, or fattening." A few days later I came across another quote from Norquist, from a profile of Abramoff in the *National Journal* in 1995, soon after Abramoff had announced he would become a lobbyist, back when the Revolution was still young.

"What the Republicans need is 50 Jack Abramoffs," Norquist said. "Then this becomes a different town."

It was a bold statement, typical for the time, but even then it raised a question we now know the answer to: Would the Republicans change Washington, or would it be the other way around? ♦



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# Present at the Creation

## *With Vice President Cheney at the inauguration of Afghanistan's first elected president*

**By Stephen F. Hayes**

*Kabul, Afghanistan*

Ninety minutes before he was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai emerged from a private meeting at his presidential palace with Vice President Dick Cheney to address reporters. "Presidential palace" is what the Afghans call it, anyway. It's a generous description. Many of the buildings in the heavily fortified compound are at least partially collapsed. Windows of the edifice that served as the backdrop for the brief press conference bear the scars of the fighting that was routine in modern Afghanistan.

Those battles have subsided in recent months. "Jihad fatigue" was the explanation from one burly State Department security contractor, a former Special Forces soldier with nearly two years in Kabul. His colleague, a more recent arrival, told me he is astonished at the improvements in the security situation in the two months since he came to Afghanistan.

Still, Taliban remnants had threatened to disrupt Karzai's inauguration, and every precaution was being taken to thwart those efforts. Those attending the ceremony were subjected to a full-body search. An American security official sporting the long hair and full beard that have become Special Forces trademarks guided bomb-sniffing dogs as they carefully examined each bag that visitors hoped to bring into the compound. Snipers were conspicuously perched atop each building in the complex; others peered out windows or the gaping holes in the bombed-out structures. Reporters using cell phones inside the palace grounds were scolded—cell phones are frequently used to detonate explosives.

Afghan workers wearing traditional, loose-fitting clothing and American-made sneakers scurried from building to building making last-minute preparations, their faces straining with effort as they hoisted unwieldy stacks of chairs onto their shoulders and darted toward the inaugural hall. U.S. Secret Service officials looked nervously about as they spoke into their wrists.

All of this activity came to a halt when Karzai, dressed in his flowing green silk coat and black lambskin hat, approached the microphone. He thanked Vice President Cheney for making the trip from Washington and then turned his attention to the American people:

> Whatever we have achieved in Afghanistan—the peace, the election, the reconstruction, the life that the Afghans are living today in peace, the children going to school, the businesses, the fact that Afghanistan is again a respected member of the international community—is from the help that the United States of America gave us. Without that help Afghanistan would be in the hands of terrorists—destroyed, poverty-stricken, and without its children going to school or getting an education. We are very, very grateful, to put it in the simple words that we know, to the people of the United States of America for bringing us this day.

Sadly, most Americans never heard these words. Gratitude, it seems, is not terribly newsworthy. Neither is democracy. The *Washington Post* played Karzai's inauguration on page A-13, a placement that suggested it was relatively less important than Eliot Spitzer's decision to run for governor of New York or the decision of the U.S. government to import flu vaccine from Germany.

This is an embarrassment. The foreign policy of George W. Bush will likely be remembered for two highly controversial decisions: (1) to eliminate not only terrorist networks but also the regimes that sponsor them, and (2) to cultivate democracy in the region of the world long thought least hospitable to it.

These are radical goals. And we may ultimately fail to achieve them. But with the removal of the Taliban and especially the inauguration of Karzai as Afghanistan's

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first democratically elected president, they can no longer be dismissed as naive or unrealistic.

That was a point Cheney made repeatedly when I spoke to him for half an hour aboard Air Force Two. Establishing democracy in Afghanistan and the Islamic world, however imperfect, "is not a romantic or idealistic notion," he said. "In many respects it's a very pragmatic proposition."

Cheney called the Karzai inauguration "historic" and said, "I think it's one more example of the power of the idea of democracy, self-government, and the right of people to elect their own leaders."

Before the ceremony began, two lines of Afghan soldiers assembled in front of the once-elegant building where the inauguration would take place. They stood at attention in their olive green dress uniforms as an older man paced purposefully in front of them, stopping every so often to bark instructions in the face of an unlucky soldier. A long red banner hung behind them from two large pillars. The words were in English, in large gold lettering: "December 7th celebrates the decision of the Afghan nation." Whoever made the sign had run out of room, and so the word "nation" was written in much smaller letters, tucked underneath "Afghan."

Cheney arrived first. He and his wife, Lynne, were greeted at the entrance and escorted to their seats in the front row. Karzai came minutes later in a black Mercedes with tinted windows. He accompanied a very frail King Mohammed Zahir Shah, who ruled Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973 and until recently lived in exile in Italy.

Media access to the inauguration ceremony was strictly limited, and most reporters watched it on big-screen televisions set up in a tent adjacent to the main building. With help from a very accommodating member of Karzai's media relations staff, I took my Sony "Cyber-shot" digital camera and posed as a photojournalist to gain access to the ceremony. We photographers were divided into two groups and led into opposite sides of the hall where we were to take pictures from against the side walls. But journalists—especially photographers—don't like to be told where they can and cannot go, and as soon as the ceremony began my new colleagues began inserting themselves into the crowd to get the best possible shots.

Ten rows from the stage was a larger-than-normal gap —maybe two feet—between the otherwise tightly packed rows of dignitaries. Several of the photographers used this gap to gain access to the front side of a large pillar in the middle of the crowd that provided a clear view of the stage. But in order to get to that spot the photographers shuffled directly in front of a row of five elderly Afghan men dressed in matching black and gold robes with white turbans. The Afghan elders briefly tolerated the presence of the photographers, but their weathered faces showed impatience when it became clear their view would be blocked for the entire ceremony. As the proceedings began, one of the old men, having had quite enough of the disruption, extended his leg across the opening, effectively blocking the photographers from coming or going. One, a young western woman wearing a traditional Afghan scarf, whispered complaints in English to the old man, who apparently did not understand and, in any case, wouldn't budge. She cursed him under her breath and resigned herself to standing along the wall with the rest of us. After several minutes, the man finally moved his leg: He and his colleagues from the new Afghan Supreme Court were called to the stage to administer the oath of office to Karzai.

Karzai's inaugural address was frequently interrupted by enthusiastic applause. Several members of the audience were moved to tears as he pledged to secure the country and prepare it for parliamentary elections. (Karzai's speech was also interrupted several times by the chirping of cell phones, and at least one foreign dignitary snored loudly as the new Afghan president spoke.) Karzai told the story of an elderly woman from the Farah province who came to a polling station with two voter's cards:

> She went up to an election worker and declared that she wanted to vote twice, once for herself, and again for her daughter who, she said, was about to deliver her child and unable to come to the polling station to vote. "We are sorry, but no one can vote for another person, this is the rule," the elderly lady was told. So she voted—for herself—and left the station. Later in the day, the election worker was shocked to see the elderly woman back, this time accompanying her young daughter to the polling station. Her daughter carried her newborn baby, as well as her voting card which she used to cast her vote.

The measure of significance the Bush administration attaches to Karzai's inauguration is evident from the presence of Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Cheney and his entourage traveled for 45 hours to attend the ceremony, flying from Andrews Air Force Base to Frankfurt, Germany, to Muscat, Oman, and then on to Kabul, where we were on the ground for only seven hours. We returned via Oman and Shannon, Ireland. (Spending nearly two full days in the air allowed us to take in nine movies, including *Anchorman* and *First Daughter*, a movie about a romance between a presidential daughter and her Secret Service agent. The Secret Service agents traveling with us dismissed the movie as unrealistic. "Like we would stand on top of her in a classroom," one scoffed.)

Cheney, who seemed relaxed and upbeat as we began



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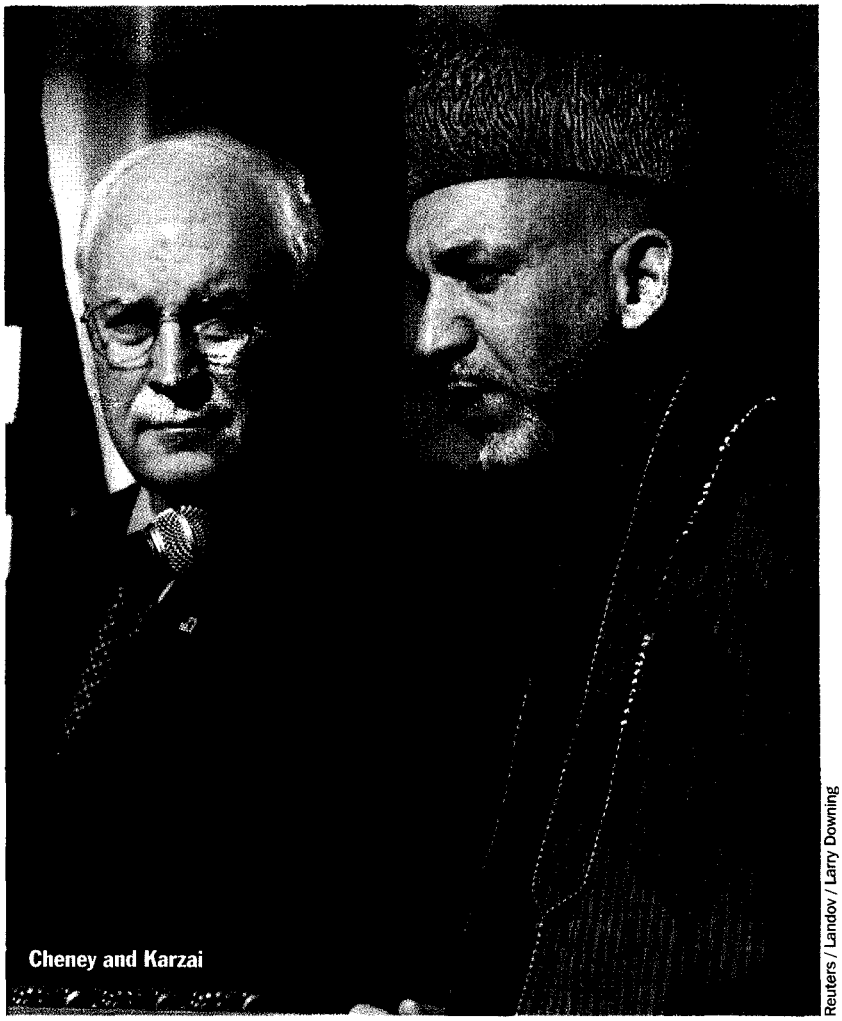
the long journey home, sipped from a cup of Starbucks in his cabin and reflected on the significance of the Karzai inauguration:

> Think about what's happened in that country, what change has brought. Back in the '70s, we were fighting the Soviets, up to the devastation of the '90s, the civil war, the ultimate triumph of the Taliban, 9/11, and, uh, back when it was a safe haven for al Qaeda—all of the training camps, the training they gave maybe 20,000 terrorists in the late 1990s, the state from which they launched the 9/11 attack. Today, we swore in the first democratically elected president in 5,000 years. I think most of us think of it in terms of 9/11 and the subsequent three years. But there's a lot more history to it than that.

Cheney should know. He recalled his involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s as a member of the House Intelligence Committee, when Washington supported the Afghan mujahedeen in their efforts to end the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. "I can remember coming to Pakistan with Henry Hyde and Bob Stump about 1987 and meeting with a group of mujahedeen leadership they brought out into Pakistan to meet with us," Cheney said. "We couldn't go into Afghanistan, obviously. We drove up to the Khyber Pass—as far as we went—and one night we had dinner with them."



Cheney and Karzai

Reuters / Landov / Larry Downing

One of the men who dined with Cheney in 1987, Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, was seated two seats to his left during the inaugural ceremonies last Tuesday. "In those days he was one of the leaders of the muj," Cheney recalled. Mujaddedi, who served briefly in 1992 as the president of Afghanistan and more recently headed the Loya Jirga, delivered the closing prayer.

None of this was inevitable. The Bush administration launched the war in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. By October 31, 2001, R.W. Apple wrote a "news analysis" for the *New York Times* comparing the "quagmire" in Afghanistan to the years-long one in Vietnam three decades earlier. Even if the war were successful, Apple concluded, Afghanistan's political future was bleak: "In Afghanistan as in South Vietnam, there is a huge question about who would rule if the United States vanquished its foe. Washington never solved that issue satisfactorily after the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, and solving it in Afghanistan, a country long prone to chaotic competition among many tribes and factions, will probably not be much easier."

He may yet be right. There is, as Cheney acknowledged, "much work to be done." But since that column was written, between 3.5 and 4 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country. Ten million Afghans registered to vote, and of that group about 80 percent showed up at the polls. The majority of those Afghans voted for Hamid Karzai in an election that was praised by outside observers as clean and extraordinarily well run, and Karzai was inaugurated without incident in Kabul. "It's a hell of a story," says Cheney.

At the press conference in Kabul, Cheney followed Karzai's remarks with some of his own. He congratulated Karzai on his victory and pledged American support of Afghan democracy. There was a brief pause at the end of Cheney's statement as both men seemed unclear about the procedures for the question-and-answer session to follow. When Karzai looked to Cheney for direction, the vice president leaned toward the Afghan leader and away from the microphone and in a voice audible only to those standing nearby, reminded Karzai of the obvious. "You're in charge now." ♦



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Erato and Pindar by Antonio Canova. CORBIS.

# The Form of Poetry

## *Richard Wilbur's collected poems* By David Mason

Richard Wilbur's most-anthologized poem, "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World," begins:

*The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,*
*And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul*
*Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple*
*As false dawn.*

The act of waking—dimly perceiving laundry on pulley lines between apartment buildings as we are *spirited* from sleep—lands us in a world of codes we must decipher like cryptographers. Then Wilbur makes another leap: *Outside the open window / The morning air is all awash with angels*. The shift from laundry to angels, like that from sleep to waking, is Wilbur's teasing and enthralling game of being. Of course, as we lie in our beds, *The soul descends once more in bitter love / To accept the waking body*, because only in a body can we pursue the mysteries of incarnation—our own and the world's. Only with our human senses can we be readers of the encoded world.

*David Mason is a teacher at the Colorado College.*

**Collected Poems, 1943-2004**
by Richard Wilbur
Harcourt, 585 pp., $35

Now eighty-three, Wilbur is the last surviving member of the "Big Three" of his generation of American poets (Donald Justice and Anthony Hecht having died just months ago). The publication of his *Collected Poems* is proof that American poetry without Wilbur would be, in the words of Robert Frost, a diminished thing. *Collected Poems* begins with a recent example of blank verse, "The Reader," in which a woman takes up old novels she once read, reentering those fictional lives that, unlike ours, are intended and complete. Yet even here an opening into mystery is possible:

*the true wonder of it is that she,*
*For all that she may know of consequences,*
*Still turns enchanted to the next bright page*
*Like some Natasha in the ballroom door—*
*Caught in the flow of things wherever bound,*
*The blind delight of being, ready still*
*To enter life on life and see them through.*

It's the perfect prologue to a volume containing the work of sixty years, because for Wilbur being is a *blind* delight, unsolvable but worth living through.

Richard Wilbur is a formalist, but he has never been content to mass-produce the common fixed forms: sonnets, villanelles, and sestinas. Nor has he been one for the large canvas or the



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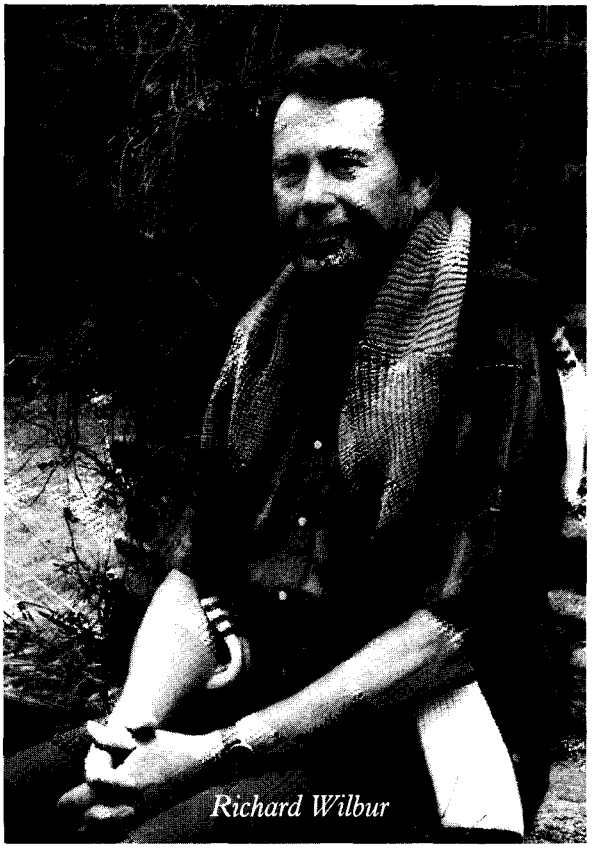
Harcourt

*Richard Wilbur*

epic. What you get from Wilbur is small-scale refinement—and a lifetime of such lyric-making turns out to be more substantial than it may have first appeared. Reviewing an early volume, *Ceremony and Other Poems* (1950), Randall Jarrell was unimpressed: "Richard Wilbur is a delicate, charming, and skillful poet. His poems not only make you use, but make you eager to use, words like *attractive* and *appealing* and *engaging*. . . . The reader notices that the poet never gets so lost either in his subject or in his emotions that he forgets to mix in his usual judicious proportion of all these things; his manners and manner never fail."

This dismissal of gentlemanliness came at roughly the moment when the barbaric yawp of Confessional Poetry was about to be sounded, not to mention Ginsberg's *Howl* and other carnival noises of the Beats. Wilbur compounded the offense of his reserve by not going crazy, leading an apparently happy life with a marriage of more than sixty years. Where was the torment?

Jarrell demanded a more dramatic voice in the early poems, but despite the appearance of dramatic monologues and dialogues in subsequent volumes, Wilbur's theatrical talent would be largely relegated to the stage. His definitive translations of seventeenth-century French drama (Molière and Racine) and his lyrics for Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* have apparently been a major source of income since his retirement from teaching in 1986. This bourgeois success would not produce a poet of outrage, but a voice of civility. Like Edgar Allan Poe, he assumes that poetry is lessened the longer the poet goes on. Like Alexander Pope, he adopts a public stance without placing himself at the center of things. His imagery is often suburban or rural, walled off from many of the issues that consume other contemporaries. Indeed he mistrusts political pieties of any sort, finding a relatively modest role for the poet, perfecting his forms, many of them minted in the course of revision, discovered rather than borrowed from past writers.

But though Wilbur was not the dramatic poet Anthony Hecht was, nor a tormented megalomaniac like Robert Lowell, this does not mean there are no sorrows in his work. It means, rather, that he has stubbornly transmuted tribulations into moments of grace, insisting that the world is more important than anything he can say about it. In "On Having Mis-identified a Wild Flower" he writes:

*A thrush, because I'd been wrong,*
*Burst rightly into song*
*In a world not vague, not lonely,*
*Not governed by me only.*

Precisely because we don't govern it, the world is *not vague*. Wilbur has a gift for humility without obsequiousness, piety without self-righteousness—which links his vision not only to Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, but also to such skeptical Christians as T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden. (His debt to the knowledge games of Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost is equally apparent.)

If Wilbur fundamentally celebrates the world rather than bemoaning it, perhaps this is because he has always felt our tenure here to be brief. We can see this as far back as his first book, *The Beautiful Changes* (1947), where the title poem notices, *Your hands hold roses always in a way that says / They are not only yours*. The paradox of Wilbur's career has been that the maker of such finely wrought poems believes all poetry will *melt and go*. His last volume of poems and translations was called *Mayflies* (2000), after creatures that live only a day.

Born the son of a painter in New York City in 1921, Wilbur spent much of his childhood in what was then rural New Jersey. In a book-length interview with Peter Dale, he commented, "My childhood left me with a preference for living in the sticks, for long walks, for physical work and the raising of great crops of herbs and vegetables. It made me a fair amateur naturalist and gave me an ability—essential in a poet, I should think—to make something of solitude."

As a young man his political leanings were "ordinary leftish ones, Rooseveltian and entirely patriotic," confirmed by a pre-college year of tramping and rail-riding across nearly every state in the nation. That remarkable journey, alluded to in the first stanza of his elegy for Auden, is also the subject of a poem called, with typical irony, "Piccola Commedia."

After his marriage and graduation from Amherst College in 1942, he enlisted in the Army's 36th (Texas) Division. When the division cryptographer went mad, Wilbur talked his way into the job. Critics have often remarked on cryptography in relation to Wilbur's love of riddles, and, in fact, riddles are one of the many places in his work where his joy in the puzzle of the code shines through—for riddles



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are child's play with adult implications. Here, for example, is one of Wilbur's recent translations of an ancient Latin riddle: *To make men weep, though griefless, is my lot. / I seek to climb, but in damp air can not. / Without me, my begetter's not begot.* (The answer, given on another page, is *smoke*.)

Wilbur saw action in Italy and France, and he would later attribute his first poems to such experiences: "One does not use poetry for its major purposes, as a means to organize oneself and the world, until one's world somehow gets out of hand." After the war he did graduate study at Harvard on the G.I. Bill, then taught there, followed by a few years at Wellesley and twenty at Wesleyan University (1957 to 1977), finishing with another ten years as writer-in-residence at Smith College. With his wife, Charlee, he reared four children, one of whom "had the bad luck to be born autistic," writing, editing, or translating twenty-five books along the way.

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*Poets at a memorial for Randall Jarrell in 1966. From left to right: Robert Penn Warren, Robert Lowell, Mrs. Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, Stanley Kunitz, and Richard Wilbur.*

The fact that Wilbur has not dwelt with a Confessional Poet's *Sturm und Drang* on domestic difficulties sets him apart from his contemporaries. For a while in American poetry, it seemed that bouts of madness and addiction were tickets to greatness, suicide merely the dues paid for one's laurels. If one lived dramatically, one wrote better. Not so, for Wilbur. Even the war gets scant notice in his work, especially if you compare him with James Dickey, Anthony Hecht, Louis Simpson, and other soldier poets. In Wilbur's first volume we do come across "Mined Country," "Potato," "First Snow in Alsace," and "On the Eyes of an SS Officer." But those poems are remarkable mostly for their distance: *We thought woods were wiser but never / Implicated, never involved.*

His second book, *Ceremony*, continued in the vein of deft irony, containing one of his most famous poems, "The Death of a Toad," in which the poor toad's passing apparently moves us *Toward some deep monotone, / Toward misted and ebullient seas / And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.* The toad gets more baroque attention than the deaths Wilbur witnessed in war. Critics like Jarrell can be excused for wondering whether Wilbur's early skill with this sort of material would ever actually issue in something more.

But Wilbur's next book, *Things of This World* (1956), would confirm his intentions and accomplishments as a lyric poet. It also won him his first Pulitzer Prize. Like all of Wilbur's subsequent books, *Things of This World* mixed original poems with flawless translations. Its brilliance is best exemplified by "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World" (a phrase borrowed from St. Augustine) with its metaphysical play on angels and bed sheets. This is the poem that introduces us to a time of day, and consciousness, that Wilbur would often revisit—the moment between sleep and waking, when we cannot help weighing one reality against another. (The new *Collected Poems* misses a stanza break in this poem, the only proofreading error I found.)

From *Things of This World* on, Wilbur's command was steadier, with no sign of the merely precious. *Advice to a Prophet* (1961) and *Walking to Sleep* (1969) both collect poems and translations one would not want to miss, though not every subject was suited to his talents. Compare his poem evoking such horrors as Auschwitz, "On the Marginal Way," with Anthony Hecht's Holocaust poems, and you will see that horror is not Wilbur's metier.

*The Mind-Reader* (1976) contains one of Wilbur's rare dramatic monologues, along with a group of his very best lyrics, including "The Writer," "To the Etruscan Poets," and "In Limbo." In "Cottage Street, 1953" Wilbur recounts a meeting with the young Sylvia Plath in which *It is my office to exemplify / The published poet in his happiness, / Thus cheering Sylvia, who has wished to die.* The poem is Wilbur's mixed rejoinder to Confessionalism and the cult of madness that swallowed up so many mid-century American poets: *I am a stupid life-guard who has found, / Swept to his shallows by the tide, a girl / Who, far from shore, has been immensely drowned.*

When in the same book he responded to the passions surrounding the Kent State shootings with "For the Student Strikers," he reminded us how easy it is to turn our fellow human beings into the enemy: *It is not yet time for the rock, the bullet, the blunt / Slogan that fuddles the mind toward force.* Wilbur would not debase his art for easy sloganeering. He was much attacked in the poetry world for advocating compassion *Even for . . . the guardsman's son.* Still, Wilbur's assertion of the power of articulateness makes him one of the most important writers in our angry and divisive time.



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In the interview with Dale, he said: "Of course there are qualities, as opposed to whole persons, which I wholeheartedly dislike: mendacity, smugness, cruelty, stinginess, chic vulgarity. I find sanctimony and cocksure atheism equally disagreeable."

*New and Collected Poems* (1987) won a second Pulitzer for Wilbur, and its previously uncollected poems included such masterpieces as "The Ride" and "Hamlen Brook," the latter ending: *Joy's trick is to supply / Dry lips with what can cool and slake, / Leaving them dumbstruck also with an ache / Nothing can satisfy*. I don't know a better stanza about poetry than this one, which builds on the delicate image of a minnow in a stream.

Like Auden, Wilbur places reality not in the literary artifact but in the reader and the poet. That is why his poems rejoice in family life, and here his long marriage to a woman who loves poetry with an earthly delight becomes a sustaining image. In *Mayflies* he printed his homage to her, "For C." He considers those who have been caught up in adulteries, love affairs, and the sexual revolution, and he concludes:

*We are denied, my love, their fine tristesse*
*And bittersweet regrets, and cannot share*
*The frequent vistas of their large despair,*
*Where love and all are swept to nothingness;*
*Still, there's a certain scope in that long love*
*Which constant spirits are the keepers of,*

*And which, though taken to be tame and staid,*
*Is a wild sostenuto of the heart,*
*A passion joined to courtesy and art*
*Which has the quality of something made,*
*Like a good fiddle, like the rose's scent,*
*Like a rose window or the firmament.*

I doubt a poet's spouse has ever been the excuse for a more transcendent lyric. One can point to weaknesses in Wilbur's *oeuvre*: a tendency to sound at times like channeled Robert Frost, a slightness in some of the early poems, a relatively narrow range of dramatic voices. But when he speaks with full eloquence, we have no better poet in America.

One of Wilbur's best dramatic gifts is his ability to write for children, and the new volume reprints the complete texts of *Opposites*, *More Opposites*, *A Few Differences*, *The Disappearing Alphabet*, and *The Pig in the Spigot*, some of them illustrated with the poet's own Thurberesque drawings. In recent years, Wilbur has concluded public readings with excerpts from *The Disappearing Alphabet*, bringing down the house and leaving his audience with a champagne giddiness:

*Because they're always BUZZING, honey bees*
*Could not be with us if there were no Z's,*
*And many Z's are needed, furthermore,*
*When people feel the need to SNOOZE and snore.*
*Long live the Z, then! Not for any money,*
*Would I give up such things as* sleep *and* honey.

Wilbur's stanzaic inventiveness has much to teach new poets who are at times too content merely to reproduce received forms.

But he is also one of the best teachers for poets of shapeless rage, asking all of us to calm down and look harder for the right words. His metaphysical bent is tragicomic because he sees how we are suspended in uncertainty. He is a poet of consciousness, of mind, who would agree with that other poet of mind, Wallace Stevens, that *The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world*.

But that's because only the physical, only the *real*, can convey genuine messages to us, whether we read them properly or not. Richard Wilbur has made this his great subject. He is our cultivated guide to the blind delight of being. ♦

# Malling Art

## *The Museum of Modern Art tries to turn itself into a branch of IKEA.* BY JAMES PANERO

The Museum of Modern Art in New York reopened on November 20 after a three-year—and $425 million—renovation. The occasion has drawn the art world like Nagas at Kumbh Mela to the building. But as the expanded museum has been praised for the modernist restraint of its new design, the actual art seems to have been pushed aside.

Designed by the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi, and encompassing the shells of the 1939 Goodwin and Stone building on West 53rd Street and the 1953 Johnson sculpture garden, the new MOMA has sheared away Cesar Pelli's 1984 glassed-in atrium and shifts the weight of the collection into a new building to the west of Pelli's residential tower. The goal, architecturally, was perhaps an impossible one: to expand available exhibition space, to preserve much of the old footprint, and to create a package that was architecturally harmonious.

Restricted outside, Taniguchi turned his attention in. The result is neither a new museum nor a purely reconditioned one but a half-breed. If the unfortunate idiom of the 1984 museum was the shopping mall, here it is the big-box store. The innocuousness of the new design only underscores its new purpose. With a crater carved through the middle, the museum has become a six-story emporium of art, finished off with slick materials and a nonthreatening aesthetic.

Where the focus of the old museum was outward to the sculpture garden and the city around it, the museum now turns inward. Self-contained and cut off, MOMA sells ideas—or maybe just one idea: the cool place of a modern art museum in a postmodern world.

*James Panero is associate editor of the* New Criterion.



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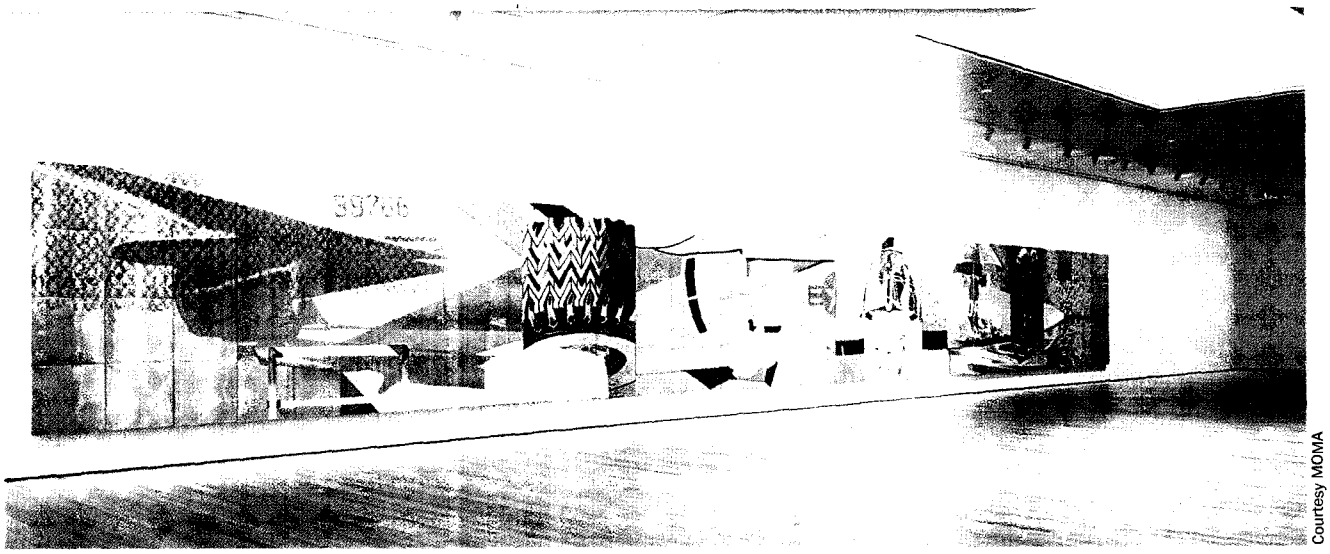


Courtesy MOMA

*Sixth floor gallery of the Museum of Modern Art, with F-111 (1964-65) by James Rosenquist.*

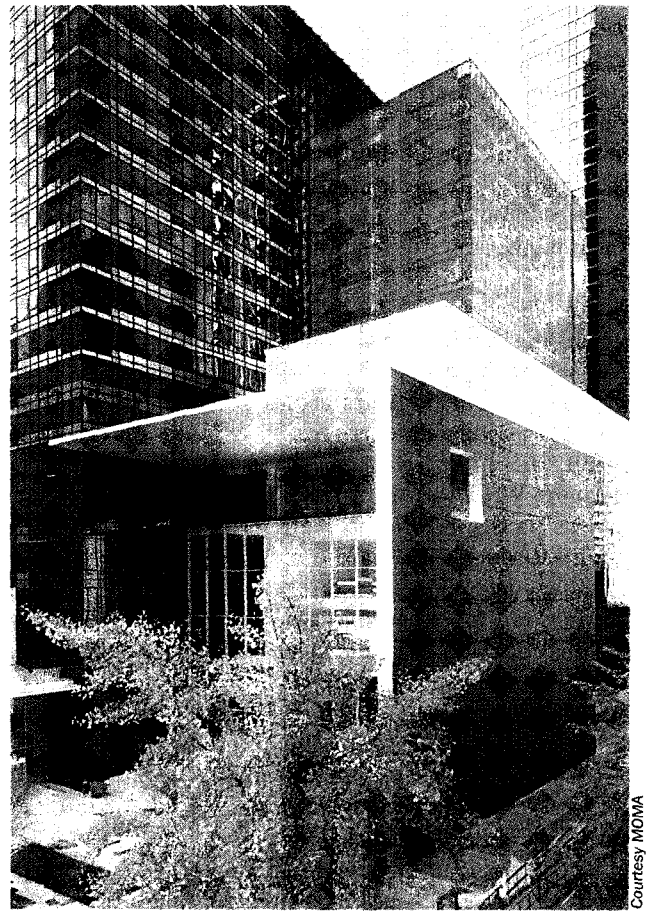
Through its postmodern send-up of modernism, the art is the background to the retail experience happening around it. MOMA now represents modern art as catch-as-catch-can, an IKEA museum.

The founding director of the museum, Alfred H. Barr, had a different idea of the Modern, which he revealed through his acquisitions and his arrangement of the museum's permanent collection starting in 1929. Barr once wrote that "This museum is a torpedo moving through time, its head the ever-advancing present, its tail the ever receding past of 50 to 100 years ago." But the torpedo of modernism self-destructed in the late 1960s (perhaps not surprisingly, around the time of Barr's retirement). No one is quite sure what has happened to contemporary art in the past forty years, but it certainly has not been Barr art, which stressed form over content, an attention to materials (drawing, print, and photography included), and a linear storyline that has become known as a "formalist" canon of modernism.

As art became "plural" and more concerned with the theatrics of display, the museum found itself with a problem—how to keep modernism current. One solution proposed by the Taniguchi redesign has been to relocate the famous permanent collection of twentieth-century art to the fourth and fifth floors of the new building—in innocuous rooms that eliminate Barr's chronology and mount his art like trophies out of the way of contemporary displays. Here, according to the curator John Elderfield, "The movements of modern art—and accordingly these galleries—may be thought of as a succession of arguments and counter-arguments on the continually disputed subject of what it means to make art for the modern age. As such, this reinstallation of the collection allows visitors to follow different paths through the galleries and follow the circuitous history of modern art." Special exhibitions go on Level Six; drawings, photography, architecture and design on Level Three. Ladies perfume and handbags remain on Level One.

In fact, selling the lifestyle of modern art is central to MOMA's new mission. The new museum has several dining options, all managed by Danny Meyer of Union Square Cafe. You might now alight to the aroma of "truffled walleye pike sausages with lobster sauce" while visiting Monet's *Water Lilies*, ingloriously removed from its former chapel to the overscaled public atrium. There are also three retail stores here in which to browse (Op-art cufflinks, $200; Built-By-Me Rock-It Chair, $95). Front-loaded with contemporary pieces, the design section of the museum might as well be an outlet of Conran's.

Good or bad, the narrative and urgency of Barr's modernist history displayed institutional confidence and a connoisseur's eye. The new museum,



Courtesy MOMA

*Exterior of the museum.*



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despite all its money and corporate tie-ins, no longer has the swagger. The old museum forecast the art of the future. It was wrong, of course, but at least it tried.

This new museum can't even decide what it thinks about the past. The policy of entrenchment is perhaps a wise one. But the results are a silencing of the dialogue Alfred Barr hoped to draw out—ideas that were once the soul of the museum, even more than its masterpieces by Picasso or Cezanne.

A thesis or counter-thesis on modernism would have been welcome in new MOMA. But the museum now gives the viewer little with which to react. The result is not a liberation from orthodoxy, but a suspicion that this institution no longer cares to discuss art with its visitors in a serious way.

You might say that the history of modernism now starts with Cézanne's *The Bather*, continues through Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Matisse's *Dance*, Pollock's *One (Number 31, 1950)*, and arrives, at last, at the "Targetini"—the drink served at the museum's opening-night gala, named after one of MOMA's new corporate sponsors, the big-box chain store Target. The night of the party, there was even a Target Lounge outside the department of painting and sculpture on the fifth floor.

An old favorite of New Yorkers is when the country mouse confuses MOMA with the Met, and asks the city mouse directions to the "Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art."

But this is just what MOMA has become. What was until recently an artist's museum, with a warren of cramped rooms and favorite spots, is aiming now to become another art institution—big, impersonal, and traditional. Mad to continue along this path, the museum is already planning its next expansion.

Once upon a time the Museum of Modern Art was a great place to bring a date. Now it is a great place to lose one. With a new $20 admission fee—the highest of any museum in the city—one might consider going it alone. ♦

# Alexander Redux

*Reading the conqueror's life, again.*

**BY CHRISTOPHER M. MCDONOUGH AND JON S. BRUSS**

Alexander the Great was a beacon of Western culture shining in the darkened East—except that he was really nothing more than a modern peacenik, presiding over international lovefests. The right analogy for him is clearly a Scottish nobleman in ancient Greek armor—except that he was obviously an Aryan *übermensch* striding through a world of lesser races. He was, of course, a titanic womanizer—except that he was a flaming homosexual, ruling a Macedonia that was basically a forerunner of Fire Island. The best way to understand him is to examine the intelligent way he practiced *realpolitik*—unless you prefer to see him as the largest megalomaniac who ever lived, a barely human figure for whom the world existed merely to be conquered.

**Alexander the Great**
*The Hunt for a New Past*
by Paul Cartledge
Overlook, 368 pp., $28.95

**The Virtues of War**
*A Novel of Alexander the Great*
by Steven Pressfield
Doubleday, 368 pp., $24.95

In short, Alexander the Great was . . . well, take your pick. In the past year, we've had everything from Peter G. Tsouras's military profile, *Alexander: Invincible King of Macedonia*, to the inevitable claim that you, too, can be happy and successful—a world conqueror!—in *The Wisdom of Alexander the Great: Enduring Leadership Lessons From the Man Who Created an Empire* by Lance B. Kurke, Ph.D.

If you prefer your history drier than Laura Foreman's picture-filled biography *Alexander: The Conqueror: The Epic Story of the Warrior King*, then you might try the volume Blackwell's has collected, *Alexander the Great: Historical Sources in Translation*. The standard work of the current crop is Paul Cartledge's *Alexander the Great*, but Steven Pressfield's fiction has its fans, and his latest is *The Virtues of War: A Novel of Alexander the Great*. And then, leaving no stone unturned, there's the cinematic adventure, *Alexander*, directed by Oliver Stone.

Curiously, this multiplication of Alexanders is not an entirely willful misreading of a verifiable historical figure by modern revisionist historians. Take a look at ancient discussions of the man—Arrian, Diodorous, Plutarch, Quintus Curtius—and you'll see that no one has ever agreed with anyone else on what Alexander was about.

In *Alexander the Great*, Paul Cartledge, the Cambridge classical historian and acclaimed author of *The Spartans*, gives us a conservative and reliable picture of the man who made Macedonia famous. This volume both avoids the pitfalls of the idiosyncratic and offers a sane and unified vision of Alexander, artfully and instructively told. Constructed from lectures delivered at Cambridge over the past twenty-five years, the learned treatment of Alexander is made the more enjoyable by the conversational echoes it retains from its years as an oral presentation.

Beginning with the Greco-Macedonian world Alexander inherited—and considering along the way Alexander's modern reception by would-be emperors, scholars, and novelists alike—Cartledge's largely chronological treatment pauses as necessary

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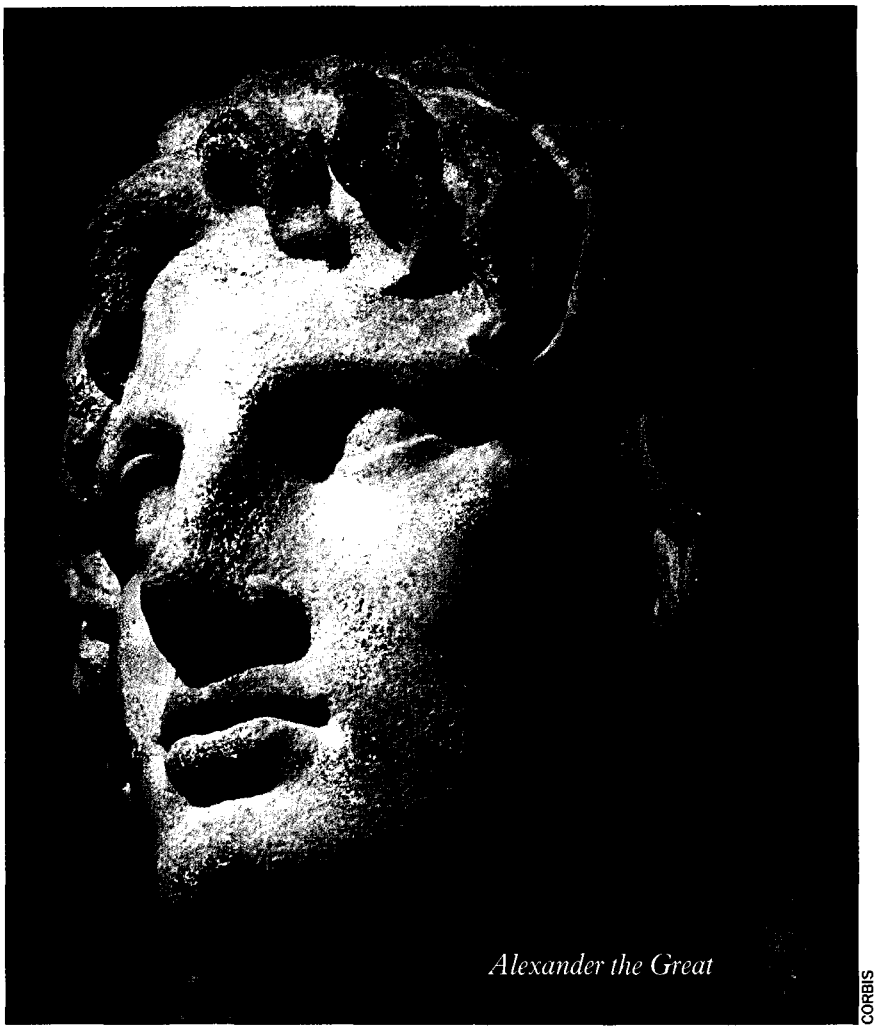
to gather into separate chapters the thematic strings. He concludes with a helpful appendix that arranges the maddening array of ancient sources on Alexander and walks the reader through the method by which he established the most likely account of what actually happened. Cartledge's *Alexander* is a fine book that will restore your confidence in historians' ability to present skillful, balanced research in a readable and engaging way.

Cartledge argues that Alexander's motives revolve primarily around hunting, the Macedonian noble's favorite pastime, which boys—including Alexander—were taught to love from an early age. Cartledge's use of the hunt as a controlling metaphor in his narrative elaborates a theme in one of our extant ancient sources, Arrian's *Anabasis*. For Arrian, Alexander was driven by *pothos*—longing desire—for conquest, emulation, and competition.

Indeed, perhaps the only sphere of Alexander's life free from this longing was that other battlefield, the one where Cupid's arrows fly. The contemporary observer would have discovered in the conquistador's bedroom a copy of the *Iliad* annotated by his tutor Aristotle (a document classicists would kill to recover). No one should underestimate the sway Homer held over Alexander's imagination. Dressed at the Battle of the Granicus in what was purportedly Achilles' armor, Alexander figured himself as the Homeric hero newly incarnated, with his faithful sidekick, Hephaestion, as his latter-day Patrocles.

From very early on, Achilles and Patrocles were considered a homosexual couple, and one cannot but agree with Cartledge's conclusion that Alexander and Hephaestion did, at some time in their lives, have a homosexual relationship—although the ancient sources never precisely say this. They didn't need to. In the complex of contemporary Greco-Macedonian sexual practices, homosexuality was not thought to militate against eventual heterosexual marriage and procreation. It would have been thought queer had Alexander *not* had a male lover.



*Alexander the Great*

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With such thoughts in mind, we may turn to Steven Pressfield, an author of note with a bestselling historical novel to his credit: *Gates of Fire*, on the Spartans and the Battle of Thermopylae. Pressfield's *The Virtues of War* is much less successful. Historical novelists must be given some range to present historical figures, but readers familiar with the ancient sources and with Alexander as a historical figure will find Pressfield's Macedonian king unconvincing.

Mary Renault pressed a political agenda in her trio of Alexander novels—*Fire from Heaven* (1969), *The Persian Boy* (1972), and *Funeral Games* (1981)—by portraying the young conqueror as an oversexed homosexual. Pressfield instead sets his Alexander—a man of blood and iron, mind you—in the a Platonic mode, eschewing all that is flesh and matter, ascending ethereal heights to the realm of the immaterial Idea: "And let me put this plain, for those of a depraved cast of mind: The love of young men is bound up with dreams and shared secrets and the aspiration not only for glory but for that purity of virtue that their hearts perceive as soiled and degraded among the generation senior to themselves but that they, the youth, shall reinspirit and carry through.... It has its physical element, but among those of noble mind, this is far superseded by the philosophical. Like Theseus and Pirithous, Heracles and Iolaus, like Achilles and Patrocles, young men wish to capture brides for each other; they dream not of being each other's men, but each other's best men." Or to put it another way, Don't ask, don't tell.

Rather than Hephaestion, we do better to consider Alexander's presence in bed with Aristotle's notes on Homer.



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For Pressfield, the poet of war triumphs over the philosopher. As his Alexander avers, "As boys we were taught, in our tutor Aristotle's phrase, that happiness consisted in 'the active exercise of one's faculties in the conformity with virtue.' But virtue in war is written in the enemy's blood." Later, before the battle of Gaugamela, Pressfield's Alexander grandiosely declares, "A million men stand in arms against us. I will rout them by my will alone." Pressfield's Alexander emerges less as a student of Aristotelian moderation than as a self-styled poster-child for Nietzsche's triumph of the will.

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*Detail of a Roman mosaic of Alexander at the Battle of Issus.*

The most enduring image that will emerge from this spate of Alexandriana will no doubt be that played by a peroxided Colin Farrell in the film by Oliver Stone. Though nearly three-and-a-half hours long, *Alexander* is forced to compress and suppress a great deal. Stone focuses on Alexander's brilliant moments (the major set-piece battles at Gaugamela and the Hydaspes), using flashbacks to fill in details such as Alexander's mother's complicity in his father's death.

As historical adviser for the film, Stone employed the services of the eminent classicist Robin Lane Fox, whose 1973 biography *Alexander the Great* served as the basis for the screenplay. Lane Fox is no garden-variety academic: In addition to being Alexander's biographer, and the author of several readable works of solid scholarship, he is also the *Financial Times*'s longtime gardening correspondent and a horseback rider. For his services, Lane Fox sought no monetary remuneration, but instead, as he told a reporter, "a place on horseback in the front ten of every major cavalry charge by Alexander's cavalrymen to be filmed by Oliver on location." Lane Fox's transformation from an academic into an on-set consultant and Macedonian cavalryman has been made into a BBC documentary first aired in May, *Charging for Alexander*.

Stone's storyline is set up by a voice-over in the character of Ptolemy, one of Alexander's marshals and long-time friends, who later established a family dynasty in Egypt that survived until the death of his best-known descendant, Cleopatra. In many ways, *Alexander* is a capstone to much of the director's previous work. Anthony Hopkins, who was Stone's Nixon, is the wise elder statesman Ptolemy here, while Alexander's father, Philip II, is played by Val Kilmer, who had been Jim Morrison in Stone's *The Doors*. The death of Alexander's father, King Philip, may have been the work of a single assassin working alone—or a conspiracy unearthed, implicating those in the highest reaches of power (A familiar Stone motif, no?). Many of the battle scenes in *Alexander* are filmed in that what-the-hell-is-going-on style that Stone pioneered in *Platoon*.

Perhaps never since the imperial aspirations of Napoleon supernovaed at Waterloo in 1815 has the figure of Alexander the Great seemed so relevant in the modern West. The United States finds itself embroiled in the internal affairs of the Middle East, toppling tyrannies and thugdoms, importing Western notions of governance to places where to many we are the infidel—and Alexander is often deployed as either an example or a counter-example, a model for what we should do or a model for what we shouldn't.

Such comparisons may justifiably be made, even if they are not straightforward. We continuously seek for motives, ambitions, reasons, causes, outcomes, rises and declines, things behind images, facts behind spin. Like the region Alexander conquered, continuously rewritten by the wash of history since his time, every new interpretation of Alexander is another layer of text on an already well-worn palimpsest. Even before he died, the man was lost behind his image. A beacon of Western culture, a shrewd practitioner of practical politics, the greatest megalomaniac the world has ever seen? Take your pick. ♦



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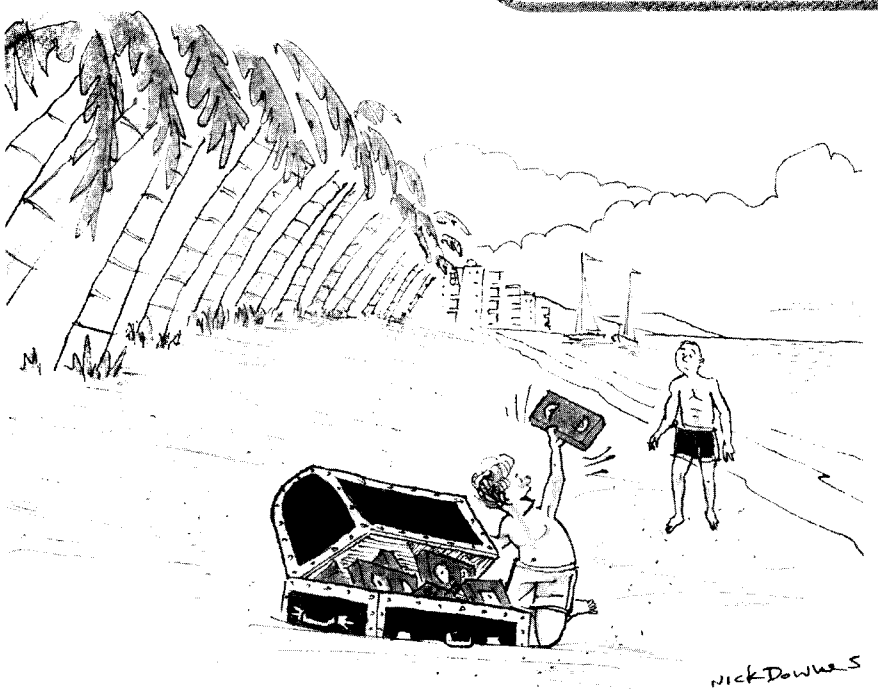


*"Pirated videos!"*

## Books in Brief

***Christmas in the South: Holiday Stories from the South's Best Writers*** **edited by Charline R. McCord and Judy H. Tucker (Algonquin, 234 pp., $15.95).** Expectations, revelations, and, more often than not, disappointment: The tidings of Christmas are less than glad in the eleven stories collected in *Christmas in the South*.

This anthology is about as far from a Hallmark sentiment as one can get. Yet the best of these narratives aren't depressing; they're deeply felt, by award-winning southern authors, including Doris Betts, Nanci Kincaid, Larry Brown, and Clyde Edgerton. None of the stories is religious. All focus on emotions that surface during the holidays. As "Merry Christmas, Scotty" declares: "It shouldn't have mattered that I didn't have anybody to spend Christmas with, but it did."

If there's one motif running through the collection, it's loneliness. But the loneliness is not bitter. It's more a lump-in-the-throat feeling. Stories like "The Gift of Lies" take on a more somber tone, as a father tells his three children that their mother will remember them at Christmas even though she's been gone over a year without trying to contact them. Although only a few characters are literally away from home, most feel cut off from their deeper selves and wish to use Christmas as a time to reconnect. That's easier said than done in these subtle and engaging stories.

*—Diane Scharper*

***Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*** **by Barack Obama (Three Rivers, 443 pp., $13.95).** This memoir, originally published in 1995, was recently reissued in paperback with a new preface by the author—now a hot political property because of his rousing speech at this summer's Democratic National Convention. Those reading to learn what he will do when he's sworn in as the new senator from Illinois next month will be frustrated, however. The book essentially ends when he decides to go to Harvard Law School, and contains nothing about his experience or intellectual development there.

Obama was born in Hawaii, grew up there and in Indonesia, went to Occidental College in Los Angeles, and became a community organizer and activist in Chicago. His father, a Kenyan whose intellect took him from a poor village to study in America, left his mother—white with midwestern roots—when young Barack was only two, had little contact with his son, and squandered his talents. But, as the book's title suggests, this father—and, more broadly, Obama's sense of an African heritage—dominate the memoir. News of his father's death draws Obama to visit Africa, to visit his relatives and ancestors there, and this is the book's climax.

Despite its focus on the personal rather than the political, there's plenty to make one doubt that Obama really believes the surprisingly conservative rhetoric he delivered in his keynote speech this year—a rejection of victimology and identity politics quite at odds with the Democrats' base. The author of the book, at least, is a third-generation liberal, still essentially adolescent, who rather nonchalantly recounts his drinking bouts and use of marijuana and cocaine, and evinces little recognition of the critical problem of illegitimacy among African Americans. Obama's account of his pilgrimage to Africa is equally unsatisfying. The romanticization of Africa is absurd and globalizes the refusal of too many blacks to be caught "acting white."

Obama has written a sensitive memoir, but not one to reassure a sensitive voter. He is honest enough to acknowledge the problems of black culture at home and abroad, but there's little evidence that he understands their causes or knows how to address them.

*—Roger Clegg*



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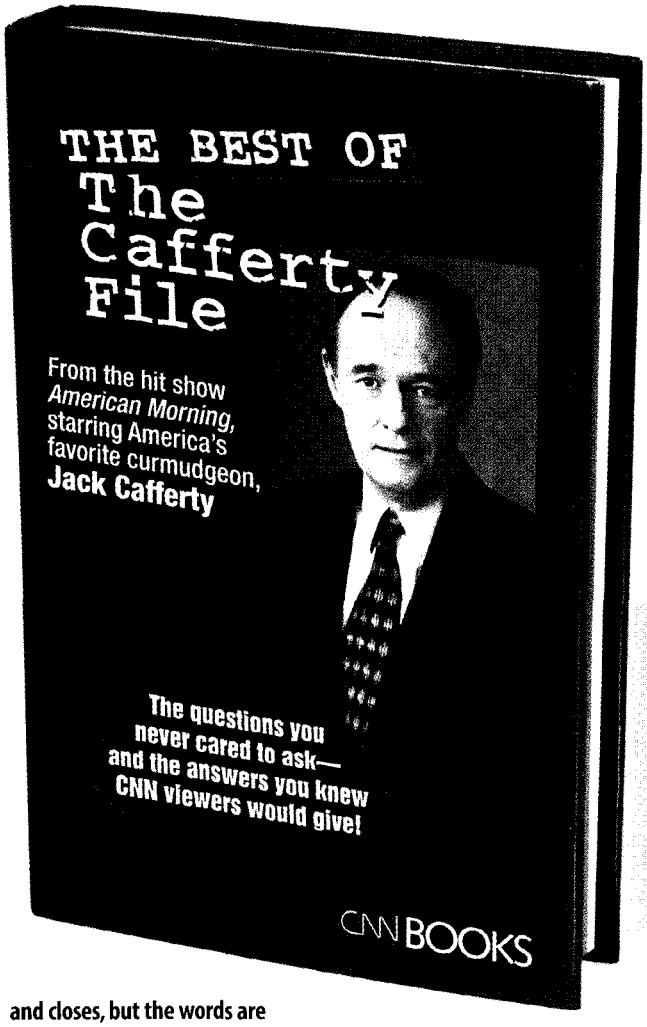
*Question of the Day, 11/15/04:* It's not even Thanksgiving, and already people are putting up their Christmas lights and playing Christmas music. Has Christmas gotten out of control?
***Linda in Miami:*** **"How can you talk about Christmas when there's massive voter fraud in Ohio? Who has time to play music and put up lights when the very fabric of our Republic is being torn apart? Has Christmas gotten out of control? Maybe. But so has our president, and nobody is doing anything to 'put out his lights,' if you know what I mean!"**

*Question of the Day, 12/17/03:* With all the problems on Planet Earth, should NASA really be asking for more money to go to Mars?
***Al in New York:*** **"I got an idea, Jack. Why don't we take all those Republicans who voted to send our troops to Iraq and strap them onto a rocket with just enough fuel to reach Mars and let them all crash head-first into an oxygen-deprived fiery pit of pain and hell?"**

*Question of the Day, 6/4/04:* A new study shows that too much milk in your diet may be harmful to your health. Will this make you stop drinking milk?
***David in Los Angeles:*** **"If milk is bad for you, I hope George W. Bush drinks ten times the daily allowance! Remember the old slogan, 'It does a body good'? I guess milk 'does a body bad' just like our 'president' who does the American body bad with his lying policies that get people killed for oil."**

*Question of the Day, 10/25/04:* Ashlee Simpson was caught lip-synching on Saturday Night Live. Should all performers tell their audiences beforehand if they'll be faking it?
***Denise in San Francisco:*** **"Don't blame Ashlee Simpson—blame George W. Bush! He's been lip-synching his way through the presidency since he stole the election in 2000! His mouth opens and closes, but the words are those of Dick Cheney and Karl Rove and neocon megalomaniacs! It's time we pulled the plug on this president! George W. Bush—you're fired!"**




*Question of the Day, 12/8/04:* Should the government make steroid testing mandatory for professional athletes?
***Jeremy in Chicago:*** **"What the government should do is make steroid testing mandatory for our president! How else to explain those war-like urges to send our troops to Iraq? I heard that steroids can cause brain damage. If so, Bush must have been using steroids since he was a baby! But now he is an even bigger baby, and a liar too! A big baby liar on steroids!"**

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## In the new issue of *Policy Review*

### "We"

***A community in agreement on fundamentals***

If we [Americans and Europeans] are often together in agreeing to use military power abroad, and we are often supportive of one another when we choose not to act in concert, and if we sometimes express disagreement that is circumscribed in such a fashion as to allow it fairly to be characterized as agreement to disagree, then I think we should face up to the fact that we are still "we," even when the subject is as contentious as Iraq.

*—Tod Lindberg*

### Eminem Is Right

***The primal scream of teenage music***

The spectacle of a foul-mouthed bad-example rock icon instructing the hardworking parents of America in the art of child-rearing is indeed a peculiar one, not to say ridiculous. The single mother who is working frantically because she must and worrying all the while about what her 14-year-old is listening to in the headphones is entitled to a certain fury over lyrics like [Eminem's]. In fact, to read through most rap lyrics is to wonder which adults or political constituencies wouldn't take offense. Even so, the music idols who point the finger away from themselves and toward the emptied-out homes of America are telling a truth that some adults would rather not hear.

*—Mary Eberstadt*

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